JACINTO BENAVENTE

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An able and scholarly analysis with quotations, allusions, and parallelisms drawn from the literature of Europe. With the exception of a brief account of Benavente's life, the larger part of the book is given to a detailed discussion of his plays and the influences which have given form to his art. Benavente was winner of the Nobel prize in 1922 and is considered one of the foremost of modern Spanish dramatists.

862 Benavente y Martinez, Jacinto **25–11623/3**

TO

HIS EXCELLENCY

SEÑOR DON ALFONSO MERRY DEL VAL

AMBASSADOR OF HIS CATHOLIC MAJESTY THE KING OF SPAIN AT THE COURT OF ST. JAMES

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PREFACE

Amongst the vigorous writers of Modern Spain whose works are claiming attention both in Europe and in America few personalities are of greater interest than Jacinto Benavente, the true initiator of the New drama. His crowded stage expresses not only many social and spiritual problems of his own country but also many of Modern Europe.

Mr. Archer in his recent work, *The Old Drama and the New*, has boldly taken up the cudgels on behalf of the moderns. 'The modern dramatist', he says, 'may or may not bring to his task a genius equal to that of the great men of old; but his method is more refined, his aim is more serious, his ideal is purer than theirs. The art of the theatre is not decadent but rejuvenated, and it behoves us not to hamper it by a conventional or affected over-valuation of the past and depreciation of the present or future.'

To no writer are those words more applicable than to Benavente. In him there are two inner voices singing as it were in counterpoint: the Spaniard in him casts longing eyes back to the golden traditions of

his mystic race ; the European in him tries to discover unity in the disordered chaos of a steel age. At times the two voices clash in conflicting harmony, and from the discord springs drama. Owing to this dual personality it has seemed fitting in this book not only to sketch a background but also to draw parallels from other literatures, in order that his plays might be seen in relation to the spirit of Spain and of Europe in general.

W. S.

Trinity College, Dublin,
October, 1924.

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CHAPTER I

I. Introductory

The poetic genius of Shelley defined the spirit of Spain as 'flame like'. Roaming amidst the starry autos of Calderón he had realized that glorious passion which has animated the Spaniard in every branch of his activity. The conquistador, standing on a peak in Darien and gazing on the lands which his country has received as guerdon for their faith, was not more filled with this passion than the mystic professor at Salamanca who, after years of imprisonment at the hands of the Inquisition, could yet on returning to his class-room say to his pupils that famous 'decíamos ayer'. The Spaniard worships life with passion and death with passion, and his soul has not changed since the days when the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance rode out to vanquish chivalry, only to raise up a nobler ideal. In no other literature do we hear so plainly the voice of angels echoing back the chants of the sons of earth. The Spaniard as no other people strikes deep his roots in his country's soil, and when he gazes at the splendour of heaven it is with all the belief in the majesty of his life on earth. To him there are no wide-portalled schools of philosophy where countless students spread the master's magic word. To him the abstractions of Alexandria speak no message, for he is a law unto himself. Spain has always set up the man of flesh and bones as the subject of her art and literature, and we recall Unamuno's correction of Terence's great line—Homo sum; nihil humani a me alienum puto. 'I should rather say,' said the sage from Salamanca, 'Nullum hominem a me alienum puto, I am a man and no man do I deem a stranger.' To Unamuno's

mind the Spaniard has remained immovable against the assaults of modern civilization—'I feel that my soul is mediaeval,' he says, 'and that the soul of my country is mediaeval; I feel that it has passed, perforce through the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Revolution, learning from them, yes, but never letting its soul be touched; and Spanish Quixotism is nothing but the most despairing struggle of the Middle Ages against the Renaissance.'[1] There is thus a spirit contrary to the rest of Europe running through all Spanish literature, and though many foreign schools crossed the Pyrenees they were never able to dominate the stubborn mind of the native Spaniard.

As the theme of Spanish art and literature is the man of flesh and bones, so no type of art interprets more completely the Spaniard than the drama, that art whose very life is action. Alone in Europe the Spanish and the English have originated a national theatre, and Elizabethan England is not more completely mirrored in Shakespeare than Spain in the golden drama of Lope de Vega or Gabriel Téllez. George Meredith, with the glancing thrust of the wit, has epitomized the comedia of Spain thus: 'Spanish comedy is generally in sharp outline as of skeletons; in quick movement as of marionettes. The comedy might be performed by a troop of the Corps de ballet; and in the recollection of the reading it resolves to an animated shuffle of feet.'[2] In that description we see the essence of the Spanish spirit as it was reflected in plays of the seventeenth century; the dashing to and fro all over Europe of the Spaniard, his hasty policy, his exalted moods followed by black discouragement, his privations, his conquests that lacked plan, his bombastic flights of lyricism sinking to the nadir of

[1] Cf. M. Unamuno, *El sentimiento Trágico de la Vida*, Madrid, 1913.

[2] Cf. G. Meredith, *Essay on Comedy*, London, 1877.

depression. 'When we turn our eyes to the past,' says Azorín, 'it all appears to us like a rapid, violent whirlwind of people gesticulating, shouting, running back to the place they had started from, and then they fall down exhausted, weak and nerveless.'[1]

From the year 1580, when Spanish power was at its meridian, down to the Cuban War of 1898, when Spain's colonial power faded and left not a wrack behind, the drama had reflected more or less faithfully the history of the country. In the eighteenth century, when Luzán with the hammer of Hans Sachs wielded the power of a dictator, Spain turned to France for inspiration and the 'afrancesado' Moratín enclosed the native spirit within the iron bars of Boileau. But even classicism with all its rigour was unable to prevent the growth of the Sainetes of Ramón de la Cruz with all their fragrance of Spanish life. In the Romantic movement, with its Don Alvaro, its Don Juan Tenorio, we see the fading pageant of Spain. These heroes that superficially wear the dress and strut like the heroes of Byron and Walter Scott are in reality but an imitation of their golden age ancestors. All the servile dependence of authors on French translations did not kill the strong native 'españolismo'. Beside the faded tinsel of those dramas of Zorrilla and García Gutiérrez, let us set the passionate whirlwind of Larra's criticisms. Larra, who has deserved to be called the 'maestro de la presente juventud' by the generation of 1898, personifies the spirit of rebellion that is always characteristic of the Spaniard. After 1850, with the advent of a new society owing to the development of Industry, the native romanticism for a time is hidden. Politics became complicated with social problems and the democratic party increased in strength. In the drama these influences caused a reaction. It was not the red passion of the Romantics that the people wanted,

[1] Cf. Azorín *Clásicos y Modernos*, pp. 148–9, Madrid, 1919.

but deeper study of human nature, and the new society which had evolved longed to see itself pictured on the stage, not in tragic circumstances, but in the conventional frock-coat of everyday bourgeois life. It was the triumph of the well-ordered play of Bretón de los Herreros founded on accurate observation of life. But in those years the state of Spanish life can best be studied in the works of López de Ayala and Tamayo. The former tried by high comedy to educate the public morally; the latter fixed his eyes on Schlegel and tried to evoke the traditional days of chivalry. Both regarded themselves as the Knight-errants of the Spanish drama, preaching the triumph of duty over passion. The drama of Ayala and Tamayo, however, could not satisfy a people which was torn by revolution, and after the six years of chaos from 1868 to 1874 there was a return with full force to the traditional values. It was with relief that old reactionary Spain triumphed in 1874 by the 'Grito de Sagunto' and Alfonso XII was declared king. Drama, however, now followed the lead of Echegeray, who, by his romantic tragedies of blood, reflected the spirit of the people in the preceding six years. The advent of his drama is a curious fact, for his ideals were in manifest opposition to the rest of literature.

According to Azorín, in addition to Echegeray, both Campoamor and Galdós determined the trend of literature in the years from 1870 to 1898. Campoamor's fluid poetry entered people's hearts with all the ease of an enchantress's magic. It was only on reflection that the sting was discovered. With marvellous art the poet had discovered the secret of introducing silently the most subversive notions beneath the garb of sentimentality. Galdós at this time was bringing back the people by his novels from the cult of the abstract which was alien to Spain, to the reality of flesh and blood. 'Galdós appears,' says Azorín, 'he

appears silently, with his little eyes that pierce, his cold, scrupulous glance; he appears, looking at everything, examining everything—the cities, the streets, the shops, the cafés, the theatres, the fields, the roads . . . for the first time reality is going to exist for the Spaniards.'[1] While Galdós was preaching the old doctrine of the man of flesh and bones, Echegeray was trying to evoke for his audiences the Calderonian drama of honour. Thus the people of Spain, after reading at home the novels of Galdós urging them to be modern and cast off their old prejudices, went to the theatre to gaze spell-bound at the traditional spectacle of husbands killing their wives in revenge for outraged 'pundonor', brothers locking up their sisters in convents, terrible tales of love and passion presented as if by the intensified rays of flashlight. Listening to those red romantic dramas the sad question of Maeterlinck comes to our mind—'Must we, indeed, roar like the Atrides before the eternal God will reveal himself in our life? And is he never by our side at times when the air is calm and the lamp burns on, unflickering?'

In Echegeray's plays there is no calm, but everlasting lashing of waves; reality is deformed, man appears writhing in passion as if he was being torn by the rack. The naturalist movement influenced his romantic nature in so far that it made him turn his attention to the terrible problems of modern life, such as heredity, madness, disease. But never was he able to make his characters throw off their silver armour: 'El Hijo de Don Juan' is inspired by Ibsen's *Ghosts*, but it is still full of those phantom knights who speak their loves and their hates in sonorous bombastic words. The drama of Echegeray is intensely interesting to the student of the Spanish theatre, for it shows how deep rooted in the soul of Spain are the old ideas which had been the basis of the literature of the golden age, and

[1] Cf. Azorín, *Clásicos y Modernos*, pp. 240.

it proves that there is a force common to all the plays from Cervantes to Echegeray.

In the years 1892–3 a very important movement began to take shape in literature. Ángel Guimerá, the great dramatist of Catalonia, began to make his work known outside his native province, and thus we find the triumph of the spirit of regionalism in the drama, for Guimerá's plays were written in Catalan and were acted at Barcelona by a new school of actors which had sprung up there eager to create new national traditions.

When considering the regionalistic movements in Spain we should always remember the geography of the country, for it has been the key to the history and even the characters of the inhabitants. The peninsular form of the country, and its strong frontier on the one side of it which is not washed by the sea, give to Spain a superficial appearance of unity. In reality it is broken up into separate sections by a succession of transverse mountain ranges which are cut by no great river from North to South. Nature by thus dislocating the country, imposed localism and isolation on its inhabitants. Thus we find separatist tendencies not only in Catalonia but also in the Basque country and in Galicia, and it is on account of this localization that modern Spanish literature is so interesting to us, for we find a wealth of local colour especially in the novel and in lyric poetry. When we realize that in the early nineties such plays as Guimerá's *Terra Baixa* and the *Dolores of Feliú y Codina* were produced at Madrid, it must be admitted that those years were not conspicuous for lack of literary talent. But the public were sorely in need of an awakening to the consciousness of literary and dramatic art. In reading the polemics of Revilla and the sarcastic sallies of Clarín it is possible to explain some of the reasons for the apathy which held them. The Zarzuela, a hybrid form of art, made up of drama and music, had become

especially prominent since the sixties, and, as Yxart says, showed the transitional nature of Spanish society at that time.[1] It showed on the stage all the aspirations of the rising middle class, but by reason of its nature did great harm both to the legitimate drama and to music, for it was the antithesis to anything deep or human. Critics like Clarín were announcing a new spirit and were undermining fast the old structure of traditional Spain. A great deal of the success afterwards won by the Modernists of the 1898 movement is due to the patient toiling of their predecessors in those dark political years when Spanish misfortunes were approaching their climax. On the one hand, we see signs of an approaching dawn of interest in literature during the nineties evidenced by the frequent performance of the works of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Goethe ; on the other, we behold the murky darkness of the political atmosphere.

The old repressive spirit of Spain's colonial policy continued until 1898 when the Cuban war broke out. In spite of the heroism of the fighting men, in spite of glorious deeds worthy of an epic, the war ended disastrously and Spain lost her remaining colonies. But the sailors who sank at Manila singing hymns to their country had not died in vain. The disaster marked the end of a chapter. Every year since has seen the introduction of new ideas into Spain. The harsh terms of the Treaty of Paris after the war, when all Europe looked on with indifference, showed the Spaniards that they must bring their country into line with modern Europe. A more liberal spirit began to inspire the youth of the country. Up to 1898 the administration of railways, mines, and other sources of national wealth had been, to a large extent, in the hands of foreigners. After this Spaniards began to invest their money in their own country, and to the

[1] Cf. J. Yxart, *El arte escénico en España*, vol. i, Barcelona, 1894.

lotos-eater's spirit of 'Hasta mañana' there succeeded an eager activity. We find that the word to 'Europeanize' came into Spanish. Many brilliant writers and statesmen took up with great fervour the question of introducing foreign methods. The 'Unión Nacional' was formed, led by philosophers like Joaquín Costa. Angel Ganivet wrote pamphlets showing that every one was trying to rush over the Pyrenees to that Mecca of the Spaniard, Paris. Do not let us think, however, that the Cosmopolitans had it all their own way; Spain never loses her heart altogether to any foreign ideals. In the modern world Miguel de Unamuno represents the traditional Spaniard, and from his watch tower at Salamanca he hurled pamphlets at Costa and the Europeans. 'So far from being Europeanized,' he says, 'I should not be ashamed of being African—yes, as African as Tertullian.' The remark is a striking one and goes a long way towards giving us a key to the Spanish soul. Spain can never be entirely European—she has always resisted with tenacity any invader, and the spectacle of the chief men of Saguntum throwing themselves and their treasures into the flames of their burning city has been repeated many a time in her history. However far her intellectuals may assimilate the ideals of her neighbours there is always the leavening of 'Españolismo' in her literature and art. All Spanish writers who start their careers by trying to be European, inevitably, sooner or later, return to the national tradition.

II. The 1898 Movement

The movement of 1898 started brilliantly in literature under the guidance of young writers whose minds were attuned to lofty idealism. In poetry the ideals of Verlaine with his musical impressionism became paramount. It has been said that symbolism is the

reintegration of the idea in poetry and the poets of Verlaine's school also aimed at giving to their poems the rhythm of life—that flux and reflux when one state of mind succeeds another in an inevitable progression. Into Spain these poetic theories were introduced by Rubén Darío the poet from Nicaragua who became a disciple of Verlaine, and on the threshold of the new century he was welcomed by the young poets of Spain, such as Salvador Rueda, the two brothers Machado, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Ramón Pérez de Ayala, and Marquina.

Of all these men it might be said that their motto was the phrase which Maeterlinck took from Novalis: 'Car c'est à l'endroit où l'homme semble sur le point de finir, que probablement il commence.' The same spirit of inquiry was to be discerned in every branch. In the novel that Basque Arch-European Pío Baroja, a Spanish Sterne, introduced the jerky, asterisk style where paradox half veils the latent sentimentalist.

When considering the movement of 1898 we must not lose sight of our Hans Sachs hammer. The new movement was tainted at its outset by the evils of eroticism and sentimental romanticism. After 1900 there was an enormous increase in the number of erotic novels written without any pretensions to being works of art. As the reading public grew and as printing became cheap, authors made a greater appeal to the large public by accentuating the tendencies of the age towards that morbid sentimentality which was an aftermath of the idealistic reaction against the naturalists. As Croce says in his essay on the characteristics of the most recent literature,[1] 'Spira un vento d'insincerità'. What he says of Italy may explain many things in the Europe of the beginning of the twentieth century. 'The heroic paganism of Carducci', he says, 'positivism and eruditism were the

[1] Published in *La Letteratura della Nuova Italia*, vol. iv, p. 187, Bari, 1922.

principal forms of the spiritual life of Italy at that time (he is speaking of the period from 1865 to 1885)... Nowadays we have no more the patriot, the verist, the positivist, but the imperialist, the mystic, the aesthete or however else they are called. The modern mystic is a Catholic, neo-Catholic, Franciscan, ascetic, but if you call him Catholic, do not question him about the fundamental ideas of Catholicism ; if he calls himself a Franciscan or an ascetic, do not let him pretend that he truly loves poverty or thinks seriously of retiring into the desert. The aesthete, if he is an artist, longs for an art that is not capable of expression in words, in tones, in lines or in colours.' Croce even prefers the former rhetorical bombast, for it rose from something solid. ' The new rhetoric ', he says, ' is the unspeakable.' The verbal forms of rhetoric now are negative, as for example : ' the dreams which no one has ever dreamt,' ' the great words which no one has ever said,' ' the rhythms which were never heard.' There is in addition to that superficial insincerity, another deeper manifestation of it which comes from being untrue to ourselves. ' It is the psychological state when a man does not lie to others any more because he had already lied to himself. By dint of lying to himself, he has generated such confusion in his mind that he can no more find his bearings ; he has tangled a skein which he is unable to unravel.' These remarks of Croce are true not only of Italian literature but, with certain reservations, of the Spanish modern movement. Spain did not escape the aesthetes who constituted themselves disciples of what we might call ' Murgerism '. We find that what is called mysticism is only an eager desire to experience new sensations and then to record them with excessive refinement and artificiality. If all poets were like Darío, poetry would run a great danger owing to excessive preciousness and refinement which would banish vigour and ' Joie de vivre '. Mysticism

to many of those modern writers was false because it was self-conscious. 'A mysticism that reasons', says Croce, 'is a contradictory mysticism.' Catholicism which wishes to make itself modern ignores that such a process of modernizing has already been accomplished through history, through the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Encyclopedic movement, and through speculative philosophy.

III. Benavente

The introduction of new ideals of literature and art was bound to react on the drama and compel it to change its traditional conventions for modern stage technique. Amidst all those new writers there moved the slender figure of a young man who was to be not only the master builder of modern Spanish drama, but also the mirror of the society of his time. For it is in the plays of Benavente that we can study the virtues and the vices of Spanish society. He followed closely the saying of the great Lope de Vega : 'El drama ha de representar las acciones humanas y pintar las costumbres de su siglo,' and his plays are a fine document for the historian and for the literary critic who wishes to study the literary conventions of the past twenty years of the new century. It is impossible to think of him apart from his contemporaries for his literary personality is made up of tendencies of the late nineties. Nor can he be looked on as a typical Spaniard. He is in reality the most cosmopolitan writer in Spain and many of his enemies have made it an accusation against him that he introduced foreign ideals which caused the decline of true Spanish art. To those, however, who examine carefully Benavente's drama, it will become plain that foreign influences did not altogether hide the Spanish dramatist who counted back his literary descent to Lope de Vega. The

traditional Spanish nature can never be driven out even with a fork, and the interest of Benavente's work to the critic springs largely from that perpetual struggle in his mind between the new and the old, Liberalism and Conservatism, the old declamatory drama and the new intensive, closely knit, psychological play.

The revolution introduced by Benavente into Spanish drama was part of a new movement which was taking place throughout Western Europe during the period from 1887 to 1893. At Paris it was led by Antoine and *Le Théâtre Libre*, and also Lugné Pöe, the founder of *L'Œuvre*. In London the Independent Theatre under the auspices of Mr. Grein started new dramatic theories. In Berlin the 'Freie Bühne' trumpeted forth modernism. All these theatres and managers and producers were surrounded by a host of young writers eager to discover new forms of dramatic experience. The onward sweep of Ibsen's great works had influenced them all, but there were only very few who understood the greatness of the Norwegian master's technique. They saw in him only a creator of huge idealistic symbols and failed to hail him as the great realist of modern suburban life. Mr. Bernard Shaw, one of the 10 per cent. of humanity gifted with clear sight, was among the first real champions of Ibsenism. He gloried in calling Ibsen suburban, 'for suburbanity', he said, 'means modern civilization. The active germinating life in the households to-day cannot be typified by an aristocratic hero, an ingenuous heroine, a gentleman-forger abetted by an Artful Dodger, and a parlourmaid who takes half-sovereigns and kisses from the male visitors.'[1] Just as Shaw by his ridicule destroyed bombastic unreality on the English stage, so Benavente in Spain led his public gradually away from 'Sardoodledom'

[1] G. B. Shaw, *Dramatic Criticism*, vol. ii.

(to use a coin of Mr. Shaw) on which they had been sunk. Gaspar, and Galdós before him, had heralded new ideals, but it was left to him to break down the resistance of the public to the modern stage. For Benavente is an example of the complete dramatist—one who is not only a writer of plays, but also an actor who has studied the full resources of the scenic art after the manner of a Mantzius. Under his guidance we shall find that most of the conventions dear to former writers disappeared. He destroyed the aside and the soliloquy, introducing in their stead the quick, jerky dialogue of ordinary speech. But Benavente's mission was a deeper one ; he wanted to get away from the old romantic love story and draw nearer to the presentation of modern life as it is. With Byron he would say : 'Romances paint at full length people's wooings, but only give a bust of marriages,' and most of his plays deal with the problems of married life.

In Echegeray and even Dicenta's plays the modern problems introduced do not conceal the old romantic ideas of honour that were a living thing to the heroes of Calderón's day. In examining Benavente's crowded stage we shall see pass before our eyes all the types of modern life, and we shall watch the struggle between the new growth of modern twentieth-century civilization superimposed on top of a deep layer of old traditions that have never died out and that give a characteristic flavour to the Spanish character.

Life

Jacinto Benavente was born in Madrid on the 12th August 1866. Madrid at that time did not wear the polished, modern look it does now. It was a dirty, sordid city, yet retaining much of the old picturesqueness that inspired Goya. Here Benavente spent the impressionable years of his childhood. His father,

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Doctor Mariano Benavente, was a specialist in children's diseases—a good profession in Madrid where, as the rhyming proverb goes :

Aún las personas más sanas
Si en Madrid son nacidas,
Tienen que hacer sus comidas
De píldoras y tisanas.

' Even the healthiest persons, if born at Madrid, should feast without ceasing on pills and tisanes.'

Doctor Benavente was one of those lovable doctors whom children worship and remember all their lives. His charm of manner endeared him to every one with whom he came into contact. His memory is perpetuated by a statue in the gardens of ' Buen Retiro '. It is said that Benavente's father did not exercise much influence over his son, but there is no doubt that it is owing to his influence that the dramatist has always shown such intense interest in children. In many of his articles included in the collections entitled ' De Sobremesa ' he puts forward new and original suggestions for the welfare and education of children, and in 1917 he brought out a book, *Niños*, entirely devoted to the discussion of child problems. In the preface to that book Benavente says of his father : ' Only those who knew him and saw him at the pillow of a sick child can realize how a doctor can be both an artist, a sage, and a saint.'

Young Benavente received his education at the Institute de San Isidro where he showed great precocity. On leaving school he went to the University of Madrid and devoted himself to law. In 1885 Doctor Mariano Benavente, who had been ever watchful of his son's future, died when the boy was only nineteen. From this moment the young man abandoned all thoughts of the legal career to which he had been dedicated, and gave himself up to literature.

He became a regular frequenter of the theatres of the capital and began to read systematically the works of the great dramatists, especially Shakespeare.

He did not, however, follow any fixed occupation, but sought to combine experiences of every sort. His varied and unconventional life was to aid him considerably in his later creative work. 'He was avid of intercourse with persons of all sorts and conditions, especially with those whose lives were simple and childlike in nature, where the heart was never very far beneath the surface and the emotions ingenuous and strong.'[1] He travelled widely and for a time became the impresario of a circus which visited Russia. In many of his works we find references to clowns, and he seems to have been fascinated by their art. In one of his early works, *Vilanos*, he devotes several essays to descriptions of the lives of clowns in the travelling circuses. He was always attracted by their grotesque masks and gestures; the clown's art, it is said, with its dependence on popular favour, afterwards taught him when writing for the stage to avoid effects which cannot be immediately caught by the public.

'"Tis meat and drink to me to see a clown.'

Thus spoke Shakespeare, and Benavente says in that phrase clowns have their best pedigree. Clowns appear in nearly all Shakespeare's works, and by the lips of his clowns, says Benavente, the great Master expressed perhaps the most profound portion of his philosophy. In another essay in *Vilanos* he says: 'Clowns again! there is the eternal comic in all its primitive simplicity. Buffeting, resounding blows, trickery in knave and in simpleton, a deceiver and a deceived—there you have all the epic of human laughter from Aristophanes to Courteline. Civilized man laughs at the misfortunes of others: As he laughs

[1] Cf. J. G. Underhill, *Plays of J. Benavente*, vol. i, introd.

the old Adam becomes manifest and he shows his teeth in a desire to devour his fellows mentally as the cannibal devours them materially.'[1] To Benavente these wandering performers appear as artists whose bodies are their instruments. In many of his romantic comedies he has laid the scene amidst cosmopolitan surroundings where the types suggest the circus artist. 'The circus folk are a race worthy of our study, a special race like the gipsies, without country of their own or any distinctive nationality; cosmopolitan in their life and speaking many languages, they nevertheless staunchly retain their immemorial traditions.'

The first important work of Benavente is a collection of poems, published in 1893, imitations for the most part of Campoamor and Becquer, the idols of the young poets of the period from 1880 to 1890. Benavente, though he reveals in this book a passionate nature, was not inspired by the gods to be a lyric poet and it is easy to understand why, though he attempted nearly every type of play, he never wrote a lyric drama. Like Gabriele D'Annunzio he showed the sensualist in himself at first. Señor González Blanco, who has made a close study of these poems, says they are interesting as being the only echo of Paganism in a writer who was to be so profoundly Christian, breaking off every tie with Pagan antiquity.[2] In most of the poems we get the impression that Benavente was eager for every pleasure of the senses. He had that tireless curiosity of Baudelaire—'J'étais comme l'enfant, avide du spectacle, haïssant le rideau comme on hait un obstacle.'

Some of the poems sing of the pleasures to be derived from various wines: at one moment he extols the radiant intoxication of champagne, at another he sobs for sherry and a guitar to tell his woes. He

[1] Cf. Vilanos, pp. 111.

[2] Cf. A. González Blanco, *Dramaturgos Contemporáneos*, Benavente.

appears as a follower of Becquer, but exaggerates the faults of that untidily romantic writer. There is some of the scepticism of Becquer about the following lines :

¡Qué ! ¡Me miras asustada
Vida mia, dame un beso !
Dices bien, la vida es bella
Aunque el amor no es eterno.
Pero lo que sois, mujeres,
Traidor, fementido sexo,
Que poco amor te ofendiera
Y mucho amor te da miedo.

From Becquer Benavente sometimes drew the sentimental, and in *Versos* he frequently weeps over his disillusion :

¡Lloraste al escuchar mi triste canto !
sintió mi corazón remordimiento
su fingido lamento
no merece su llanto :
y así al verte llorar quedé abrumado.

At other times the style and thought of the poems resembles the art of Campoamor. Benavente was at pains to study the neat style of the author of *Humoradas*, who, like Musset, was a lady's poet and wrote couplets for fans. *Versos* are not all passionate love-songs ; at times we come across a poem full of the most fine-edged satire. He seemed even at this stage to be tortured by contradictions. He is for ever contemplating the ' To be or not to be ' of Hamlet :

¡ser o no ser ! el soliloquio eterno
que hace apurar un mundo de amargura,
por temor a las penas de un infierno.

Few authors present such an enigma to the historian. In the sonnets he passes from a mood of passionate exaltation before woman's beauty to one where the ideal seems to be the ephebus. There is much in him of the self-conscious and unhealthy morbidity which

we notice in the followers of Baudelaire, and the image which emerges from these poems is that of a man cruel and Mephistophelian. In some of the sonnets we find the subtle dramatist, always courteous and smiling, yet hiding a cruel Toledo blade of satire. To be a poet we must soar aloft poised on the wings of our illusions—'Toute la vie est dans l'essor', said Verhaeren. But Benavente had a cruel little devil within him which destroyed the soul in which it lodged. To this devil all ideals are falsehoods, and even to heaven he raises his disdainful face and mocks at everything.

> Para él todo ideal es desvarío,
> al cielo eleva su desdén intenso.
> Y hace mofa de todo, a pesar mio.

These words occur in the beginning of the book and they are characteristic of the early Benavente. His works, harsh at first, became like wine, mellowed as time went on. The malignant little devil that he speaks about as torturing him within is the spirit of Humour—that humour which, as Pirandello says, loves to pull the heart to pieces as if it were a piece of machinery, in order to see how it is made.[1]

In the *Teatro Fantástico* there is a very different spirit to that of *Versos*. Though the latter represents most of the earliest work of the author, the former was published in 1892. Benavente had always been interested in the theatre; he relates that as a boy he took delight in fashioning little theatrical pieces in which he could act. Thus it is not surprising that he should attempt plays early in his career.

The little plays in the volume *El Teatro Fantástico* were not primarily meant for stage production, but they are of great interest to the student of Benavente's dramatic evolution. The four pieces are all of a fantastic, romantic character, inspired chiefly by

[1] Cf. Pirandello, *Umorismo*, pp. 195, Firenze, 1920.

Shakespeare and Alfred de Musset. They are a direct reaction against the naturalist dramatists who had been following the positivist ideas of Zola. 1892 was a memorable year for the Spanish drama, for Galdós produced *Realidad* and Gaspar produced *La Huelga de los hijos*—both epoch-making plays.

These very early compositions of Benavente had considerable influence and became the models for much modern Spanish prose. He seems to have been inspired, in them, by the ' diamond spirit ' of Alfred de Musset, with its subtle ' marivaudage ', especially in *El encanto de una hora*. At the stroke of twelve two little porcelain figures—' une merveilleuse ' and ' un incroyable '—awake, and descend from their pedestals for one hour of joyous life. It is a charming little miniature full of languid sadness. What Monsieur Maurice Donnay says of the prose of Alfred de Musset might be said of Benavente's style in these pieces—' quelque chose de doux comme le vent de l'ouest, de pâle comme les rayons de la lune.' A new quality was being introduced into the bombastic Spanish language. The heroes and heroines of Benavente will not speak in the marble massiveness of the traditional Castilian, rather will they adopt the fairy lightness of French prose. No better example could be given of that ethereal lightness than in the prologue to the last play in *Teatro Fantástico*, which is called *Cuento de Primavera*. Benavente followed Verlaine's precept :

> ' Prends l'éloquence et tords lui le cou '—

and again :

> ' Que ton vers soit la chose envolée.'

The prose has the same exquisite grace as that beautiful passage in Darío's *Azul*, where he describes the death of the little Empress of China.

To the same period belong *Vilanos*, or ' Thistle-

down', and *Figulinas*—books full of little sketches worked to a pitch of cameo-like perfection. These works are interesting as showing at what an early date the author puts his subjects into dramatic form. Most of the sketches are in dialogue—that sharp, swift dialogue afterwards so great a feature of the Benaventian theatre. To the student the sketches are of interest, just as the sketch books of López de Ayala, in showing the gradual forming of the author's dramatic mind. We find dialogues on all subjects from the frivolous chatter of the countess choosing her frock to the deep psychological conversation that reveals the tragedy in the lives of two people. The majority of the scenes show modern life in Madrid in the families of the upper and middle classes. But Benavente had merely jotted down observations taken from real life without thinking of working them into plays. As literature they are of no importance, but they do help us to understand the nature of the author's mind.

Cartas de Mujeres—'Women's letters'—which appeared in 1893, is the first work which shows that the foundation of Benavente's work is feminist. In these letters he tries to plumb the depths of the Spanish woman's soul. Many have tried to compare them with the *Lettres de femmes* of Marcel Prévost. It is quite true that some of the lightness of touch of the French writer is to be found in this new Castilian prose, but the women of Benavente are diametrically opposed in type to those of Prévost. The critics have been led astray by the title. Perhaps the idea of writing those letters came to Benavente after reading *Lettres de femmes*, and he may have thought that a similar book would have a great success on Spain.

Cartas de Mujeres is first of all important for its style. It was the harbinger of the new methods of literature that were coming into Spain. These, with reference to Benavente, might be summed up in one

word—simplicity. As Señor González Blanco says, 'Spanish literature at the end of the nineteenth century was weighed down by mountains of heavy prose writing.' Galdós, Pereda, Palacio Valdés had been writing countless novels, mostly serious in tone. Into that atmosphere, overladen with thought, Benavente's scintillating prose came like a ray of sunshine; what others had taken a chapter to say he now said in an epigram. This feminine correspondence is simple and colloquial in style, but with what deep knowledge of psychology he reveals the complex character of his heroines! It is interesting to compare the book with *La Mujer*, by Severo Catalina, which had been published some time previously. Catalina speaks of woman with bombast and affectation: Benavente for the moment lets his impish satiric spirit become as the shadow to his women, forcing them to reveal themselves. Catalina puts on ostentatiously the thinking cap of the philosopher and studies women by definition; Benavente never tries to point a moral or impose a dogma on his readers. In none of his early works do we find any attempt to preach or to teach. True child of his generation he held that Art should not instruct but should mirror the shifting pageant of life.

Though some of the critics were hostile, *Cartas de Mujeres* was well received by the public, and it is interesting to compare its success with the comparative failure of *Femeninas* of Ramón Del Valle Inclán, published two years afterwards. Benavente, though a modernist, was welcomed by many members of the old order, Del Valle Inclán was rejected as an innovator. We must remember that Benavente was clever enough to be able to combine his modernism with traditional values in literature. In these early works he presented an easy way of passage from the old ideals to the new and did not shock ears accustomed to sounds familiar. Ramón Del Valle Inclán, on the other hand, from

Femeninas onwards hurled defiance at all tradition. Like a modern Alcibiades he was accused by his countrymen of throwing down the Hermae—that is to say the old ideals. Manuel Machado in *El Año Teatral* (1917) says: 'The word modernism, which includes the last stage of our literature, was at that time (he alludes to 1896) used to express every kind of disdain.' 'People', he says, 'when speaking of the new art in those days bayed like dogs at the moon and broke into inane laughter, though a little later, when the sense of outrage and novelty had worn off, they accepted these same ideas without thinking.' Del Valle Inclán's object is to arouse in the spectator the greatest possible number of sensations. Any other ideal must be, according to him, alien to Art.[1] Benavente in *Cartas de Mujeres* was inspired by the true spirit of Spanish realism which is always poetic. However delicate in sentiment he is always a realist. Martínez Sierra in 1917 published a book of letters to the women of Spain (*cartas a las mujeres de España*) which is interesting as a contrast to Benavente's work, for both authors are moderns, and the work of both is characteristic of Spanish realism. Benavente has no illusions about his heroines, but analyses them with strict impartiality. Many of the supposed writers of these letters are frivolous and empty-headed, and in a few words they confess their inanity. Martínez Sierra, on the other hand, is an optimist and his works have been called a dignified temple erected to duty. 'In the paradise of Martínez Sierra woman is born before man, but she is not the first to bite the apple.'[2] The cold irony of Benavente disappears in Martínez Sierra, who looks at the world through rose-coloured spectacles and whose humour has been compared to the kind laugh of

[1] Cf. Julio Cejador, *Idealismo Artistico Contemporáneo* in *La Lectura*, July 1917.

[2] Cf. *Poetas y Prosistas del* 1900, by R. Cansinos Assens, 1919.

the ancient mystics. Benavente plays on an instrument of greater compass than Martínez Sierra. In one letter he will give us the fierce words penned secretly by a passionate woman to her lover, in another the tender farewell to her mother from a maiden just about to be married. Sometimes it is a young girl who is writing at the order of her father and mother to her aunt to say that a little brother has arrived :

'Mother and Father tell me to write to you that my little brother has arrived. He arrived yesterday morning, very pink and fast asleep, and he is not yet awake; but he must be dreaming, and he cries a lot. Father says I am to tell you that I love him dearly and that I am going to be his godmother and give him the toys which are no use to me; I have very few and all are of use to me; but when you send me other new ones I shall give him those I have now, though as he is a child he will not like them. I shall send you sweets from the baptism. I am also going to baptize the doll which you gave me. Kisses to all, from your niece.'

There are letters, too, written by a religious woman to her priest. Benavente evokes a beautiful picture of the wonderful faith in religion of the Spanish woman, a descendant of the race which produced Santa Teresa de Jesús. In such letters we see the illuminating spirit of renunciation which animates the soul of the Spanish woman.

'What is my pain in the immensity of human suffering? Every pain is great for a small heart; I shall enlarge my heart that it may contain all the sufferings of the world, that this pain which fills it now may be but a drop of water, imperceptible.'

Thus speaks the modern Spanish mystic in words that recall the 'Night of the Soul' of Saint John of the Cross. Many times in Benavente's tragedies the heroines with closed eyes, without anxieties or doubts, in complete peace, dissolve themselves in that immense night of sadness. The chattering girl friends, the

match-making mother, the capricious lover, the convent girl, the mother writing to her extravagant son, all pass before our eyes as if taking part in a pageant of modern Spain. One of the most beautiful of all is a letter supposed to be written to her mother, by a daughter who has learnt that she too is a mother.

'Mother of mine, I too am a mother; with what pride I write that word which raises me to equality with you, beloved Mother. I owe you so much, Mother! for all my ingratitude, for all the tears I made you shed; on my knees I beg pardon at this moment when I tremble at the thought of any ingratitude from this piece of my life which is all mine and only lives through me.'

Benavente was afterwards to develop this theme of maternal love in *Señora Ama* (1908) and *Campo de Armiño* (1915).

In these 'letters' of Benavente there are sketches for all his future heroines. 'They are not', as González Blanco says, 'the candid and emotional heroines of Coppée, nor are they depraved like the heroines of Willy. They are women of the general type whose vices and virtues make out an even balance.' We should always remember though, that to a Spaniard the woman even of the general type is always regarded poetically, for Spanish realism is always poetic. And not to leave us in any doubt as to his intentions the author in the introduction speaks thus:

'A book dedicated to you, must have, even though indirectly, a reflection of your goodness and beauty; for you, women, when you are pretty, are dispensed from being good; when you are good you need not be pretty, and when you are both pretty and good, there is no help but to adore you on our knees as if you were a reflection of Divinity on earth. Without you Art would not exist, for art is love and Art without love would be a religion without a God to consecrate it.'

In these last words Benavente sums up his ethical idea of art and religion. In the preface to the complete

edition of his published plays he says: 'I love Art above all things, but whatever I have realized in my works was but a vain longing springing from my infinite love.'

In one of his critical works Benavente makes the following remark:

'The stage must be loved for itself, perhaps with greater devotion than any other form of art. The true playwright must have passed his life in the theatre, he must have seen all the plays and all the actors within his reach, and he must have acted himself. Remember that no small part of Shakespeare and Lope de Rueda and Molière was the actor. To the playwright the world must be a vast stage; men and women must be tragic heroes and heroines, or comedians in one immense play. The most beautiful sights of nature must appeal to his eye as stage scenery. And then, too, he must have the knack of finding his plays.'

Benavente's career fulfilled these conditions in every particular. From youth onwards he had studied all the problems of the stage and spent a great part of his life in the theatre. He had not only taken part in the crude manifestations of the circus but became an actor on the buskined stage, and joined for a time the company of María Tubau, where his first part was that of a sportsman, then an object of laughter to the Spanish public.[1] In an interview which he gave to the Madrid periodical *La Esfera* (in 1916) he tells us that he would rather have been a great actor than a writer of plays.[2]

The first period of Benavente's production may be called satiric. From 1894, when he produced *El Nido Ajeno*, down to 1901, dramatic ideas came to him armed with the Toledo blade of satire. The bloated, complacent society which had evolved in the years of

[1] Cf. J. G. Underhill, *Plays of Benavente*, vol. i, Introd., pp. viii.

[2] Cf. Introduction to *Tres Comedias of Benavente*, edited by J. Van Horne.

Spain's misfortunes at the end of the century was ready material to this modern Molière. At first, he attacks the society of Madrid and afterwards turns his attention to provincial life. Nor did he confine his attention to high comedy of manners, but also translated into Spanish Molière's *Don Juan* and adapted Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* under the title of *Cuento de Amor*—a labour of love, written in the most perfect Spanish prose. He also followed the Spanish tradition in writing one-act plays. We should, however, remember that Benavente's one-act plays differ from the 'Genero Chico' type in that they mostly deal with the upper classes. By the production of the one-act play *Modas* in 1901 he made an innovation in the essentially national type of play called the sainete. Before the production of *Modas* the sainete was usually confined to characters drawn from the lowest class. Benavente showed that the sainete of the upper classes could achieve as great a success.[1]

In addition to his theatre work he also devoted himself to journalism and became director of the *Review La Vida Literaria* in 1899, which was mainly responsible for giving a voice to the young writers of the New Movement. These early years were bitter for the young author, and as Padre Eguía Ruiz says of him, 'no entró de sopetón en el templo de la inmortalidad.'[2] Every new satiric play that appeared increased his unpopularity with the classes that felt the lash. The individuals of new 'Societies' are not averse to seeing themselves and their manners pictured upon the stage. Former dramatists like Tamayo and Ayala reflected the *nouveau riche* bourgeois of 1860 but without malice. Benavente never conceals his disdain when describing their descendants in the society of 1896–1900. But Benavente has always been

[1] Cf. *Las mejores páginas de J. B.*, by A. Miquis, vol. i, Madrid, 1918.
[2] Cf. *Literaturas y Literatos*, by P. C. Eguía Ruiz, Madrid, 1914.

a patient genius and no abuse has ever discouraged him. With calm he was able to face all the varied demonstrations of the public's discontent, and in reply to protests he would say : ' I make the public for my plays, not my plays for the public.' Unlike many of his contemporaries he did not take revenge by attacking his critics ; he limited himself to satirizing with pinpricks and disdaining the drama then in vogue. One might say that he covered his face with his hands in horror at the drama of Echegeray, came out of the theatre in too serious a frame of mind after seeing a play of Galdós, and then said to himself: ' The former drama is false, the latter is taken too much in earnest. I prefer the second, but Galdós must have muscles of steel while mine are made of violin strings. Galdós tries to convert Spanish society to the naturalist morality and he feels within him the fervour of the apostle, the soul of a redeemer and the brain of a sage. I think that claim of Galdós is fantastic, for I have not come into the world to be an apostle or a dogmatist nor do I wish to give out as truths what I see are not so. Life must be treated as a joke, for it is nothing but a harlequinade, an exhibition of Guignol puppets.' Thus does the learned professor Julio Cejador y Frauca[1] sum up Benavente's mentality, and there is no doubt that it fits admirably his temperament in those early years. But Benavente, though he has always been inclined towards irony, was gradually to change towards the style of Galdós the apostle and redeemer. In the last period of his plays, from 1914 to 1920, he preaches his philosophy in a way that recalls the great Liberal in *Celia en los Infiernos*. In 1901 we notice the gradual evolution of Benavente's style onwards from Satire. The play *Sacrificios*, which was produced in that year, opens a new period. In this second period might be included all the plays written between 1901

[1] Cf. Cejador, *Hist. de la Leng. y Lit. Cast.*, vol. x, Benavente.

and 1914. It is true to say that he did not cease in that year to write satire, but the satiric plays produced afterwards are but continuations of the plays of the years 1894 to 1901.

In the years 1901 to 1914 Benavente's genius reaches its highest development and in consequence we find the utmost variety in the type of play produced. The satiric tendency of his style mellows and becomes humour—that spirit whose laugh is always a grave one. The critic examining those plays is in great difficulty in the matter of subdivisions for the master's spirit eludes like quicksilver. At one moment he produces a comedy of middle-class life, at another a pageant play. The year 1903 saw the production of the two great pageant productions, *La Noche del Sábado* and *El Dragón de Fuego*, which represent the most transcendental part of his work. And they in their turn are linked up with *Princesa Bebé* and *La Escuela de las Princesas*—comedies of court life. In 1903–4 Benavente initiated his plays of middle-class life which might be called prolongations into contemporary life of the high comedy of Ayala. In *Rosas de Otoño* we get the central play of the series, and Mr. Underhill, with thoughtful imagination, calls it the drama of middle age and the sequel to *Princesa Bebé*, the drama of youth.[1]

In December 1907 Benavente reached the pinnacle of his fame by the production of *Los Intereses Creados*—a play characteristic of his art combining satire and humour with a higher idealistic philosophy.

In 1909 he brought into practical effect an idea which had long been before his mind. Even in the earliest works, such as *Vilanos* and *Figulinas*, we see indications of his passionate interest in the welfare of children. And in that year with the actor Porredón he founded the children's theatre in Madrid. In addition he wrote

[1] Cf. J. G. Underhill, vol. ii, Introd., pp. xiv.

several beautiful little fairy plays for the new institution. *El Principe que todo lo aprendió en los libros* and *Ganarse la Vida* are charming examples of how fairy-like imaginings may be combined with educational principles. When we compare Benavente's children plays with Barrie's *Peter Pan* or Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*, we find that he has often sacrificed beauty to moral purpose. His little princes and princesses have not the divine gaiety of Peter Pan; they are too serious and try to model themselves on grown ups. When reading the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm we feel all the truth of Wordsworth's 'Ode to Immortality', where he says:

> Not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home.

Upon Benavente's children the shades of the prison-house have already begun to close and we wish for more impish joy. In *La Princesa Sin Corazón* (1907), however, we reach the true fairy story spirit, though it is not the goblin of Grimm who frightens us, but the good fairy of Perrault who seems to beckon us with smiles.

The years 1908 to 1912 were lean years, for only four important plays were produced. The reason for this diminished output was that Benavente was engaged in writing the weekly articles for 'Los Lunes' of the paper *El Imparcial*. These articles, which he afterwards published in five volumes under the title *De Sobremesa*, are of interest to the student, for they expose among other things his views on dramatic criticism. In the volume *El Teatro del Pueblo* he included various articles dealing with subjects connected with the stage. In addition he has published volumes called *Acotaciones* and *Crónicas y Diálogos*, which are really a continuation of *De Sobremesa*. In the

five volumes of *De Sobremesa* Benavente has acted up to the title which means ' after-dinner conversation ', for we find general criticism on all manner of subjects of the day related in the polished manner of a smart dinner-party where champagne stimulates the spirit. These conversations are not philosophic nor worthy of a Socratic symposium, and very often the thought is trivial and frivolous. But Benavente is never so shallow or dull that he cannot suddenly dart one of his silvery thrusts and kill us with an epigram. The Spanish in their love for aphorisms have much of the Arab about them, and Benavente resembles a modern Hassan squatting on his beautiful carpet and every now and again uttering some piece of worldly wisdom. And in this quality he betrays the dramatist, for, as Mr. Salvador y Madariaga says, proverbs are lightning comedies.[1] Benavente works off those little comedies very often in *De Sobremesa*. There is no attempt at arrangement or pattern in these volumes ; the sections which are numbered, but have no title, start myriad topics of the author's fancy without ever being linked on to anything else. There is some of the glorious uncertainty of mind that we find in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

There is no doubt that the articles of *De Sobremesa* kept Benavente from writing plays ; between the years 1910 and 1913 there is only one play, *La Losa de Los Sueños*. Indeed the public was beginning to suspect that the master was condemned to everlasting silence, when he appeared in December of that year with *La Malquerida* and registered one of his most complete successes. The great public enthusiasm at this performance, at which the King of Spain was present, raised the author to a pedestal in the minds of the people. Spaniards, however, do not like setting heroes on pedestals, for it encourages a natural impish desire in many to throw stones and to cast the statue down. Before *La Mal-*

[1] Cf. S. Madariaga, *The Genius of Spain*, Oxford, 1923.

querida Benavente had been supreme in Spanish drama since the period of his early satiric productions. If there was criticism (and when in Spain is there unanimity?) it bowed before the public enthusiasm. *La Malquerida* was the summit of our author's fortunes. Ever since, his star has been gradually waning in his own country. In a passage of *De Sobremesa* Benavente quotes Leonardo da Vinci's words: 'To be beautiful at any stage, at any hour, in any light, art must have a form that never passes away. Dramatic popularity fades away as quickly as the beauty of an actress; perhaps it is for that reason Shakespeare the dramatist is for ever preoccupied with thoughts on the swift passing away of things.' Yxart in his book on drama has said that no movement in Spain ever lasts more than fifteen years.[1] Benavente's spirit had triumphed during its allotted span and it was time for new developments. Critics rose up against him and called him, as that brilliant modernist writer Ramón Pérez de Ayala did, 'un valor negativo para el teatro.' When the war broke out in 1914 it increased the differences between one section and another of the writers and public by the bitterness of political discussion, always the passion of the Spaniard. Benavente, though he owed a great deal of his virtues as a writer to his assimilation of the French and the English spirit, ranged himself on the side of Germany. It is very difficult to understand his point of view if we merely look at his works, for there is very little trace in any, of the German mental attitude towards life. No author was ever less affected by that 'Treble Dutch lumbersomeness' of the German spirit. All the qualities of his work are intensely Latin with the addition of a certain Ariel grace which he derives from Shakespeare. But we must not look into Benavente's literary personality for answer to the question as to why he

[1] Cf. Yxart, vol. i.

became pro-German, but rather to politics. After 1914 he descended like the hero of his play *El Collar de Estrellas* (1915) from the rarer atmosphere of art and entered the political arena to range himself on the side of one of the political parties. At the outbreak of the World War Spain was ignorant of the internal affairs of the other European countries. The sudden dash of the German troops through Belgium towards Paris, and the failure of the allies to repel them, created the impression in Spain that the Germans would undoubtedly win. Thus the Spanish army, the clergy, and the aristocracy became pro-German. The army was pro-German because it saw that the German army was the best trained in the world. The clergy turned their thoughts back to the period when they were supreme in the state and looked with hatred on anti-clerical and revolutionary France and Protestant England. They imagined, too, that a victorious Kaiser would restore temporal power to the Roman Church. The aristocracy naturally hated democracy and republicanism and many looked with hatred on the possession of Gibraltar by England. All these feelings were zealously fanned by German propaganda throughout the War.

In 1916 a volume called *El Año Germanófilo* appeared at Madrid, with a prologue written by Benavente. In this prologue the author makes the following remark: 'In Spain there can be no sympathy for France; has France done anything to deserve our sympathy?' Later on in the same prologue he adds: 'The pro-allies on this occasion signify the same thing as the *afrancesados* during the War of Independence.' The rest of the book is composed of a diary of the War and also articles by various writers. From these articles it will be gathered that a great many of the foremost intellectuals of Spain were pro-German. Most of the business men were pro-ally and among the literary men

noble spokesmen, like Unamuno, warmly espoused the cause of the allies. Among many there was vacillation, and even the staunch Señor Maura, who in 1915 was strongly pro-Entente, afterwards in 1917 spoke against England. The vacillating policy of Spain in those years Benavente has tried to mirror in *La Ciudad Alegre y Confiada*, the sequel to *Los Intereses Creados*. Many have tried to see a symbol of Maura or Canalejas in the noble figure of 'Exile' in that play. As regards the neutrality of Spain in the War, for which the courageous Señor Dato was mainly responsible, we must echo Mr. J. B. Trend when he says that the Spaniards of to-day have done a real service to Europe by remaining neutral in the War. 'They have', he says, 'not only saved their country, but they have preserved the European spirit more than any of the belligerent peoples.'[1] According to Trend the 'Intellectuals' almost without exception were pro-ally. But he forgets *El Año Germanófilo*, which had pro-German articles in it by such intellectuals as Rodríguez Marín, Cotarelo y Mori, Saldaña.

The death of the great Spanish scholar, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, left vacant a place in the Spanish Academy and Benavente was elected. It is interesting to note that this chair in the Academy was occupied by the famous scholar and dramatist Hartzenbusch before Menéndez y Pelayo. It is a matter of speculation as to whether Benavente will act up to his position as one of the 'Immortals' and polish and file the Castilian language, or whether he will continue to create new dramas. His plays since 1914 have not passed unchallenged by the critics at home, but in 1922 the award of the Nobel Prize for literature gave him a place among the world's celebrated writers. In the United States he is already well known, thanks to

[1] Cf. J. B. Trend, *A Picture of Modern Spain*, London, 1921.

the efforts of Mr. Underhill, who has translated most of the best plays. In European countries his name is gradually coming into prominence.

In appearance Benavente is a Spaniard of the Golden Age, and many have noted his resemblance to the picture of Cervantes as described in the Prologue to the 'Novelas Ejemplares'. Let us conclude this chapter with the description given by one who knows him: 'He is a small, neat, refined man; his manners have an air of feminine elegance; his aquiline profile and his pointed beard give a typically Spanish expression to his countenance, but his character lies above all in his brow which is broad and spacious like that of Cervantes, and in his bright, witty eyes, in which nevertheless there lurks a faint shadow of melancholy.'[1]

[1] Cf. *Tres Comedias of B.*, edited by J. Van Horne, Introd.

CHAPTER II

REALISTIC PLAYS

I. Satire

Benavente's first play, *El Nido Ajeno*, which was produced at Madrid in 1894, did not arouse much interest, for the public was too much occupied with the plays of Echegeray and Galdós. But by his next play, *Gente Conocida*, he attracted universal attention, and it is possible to see in it his new theories of the drama. *Gente Conocida* [1] was the first product of a reaction against the old Spanish romantic drama with its shouting and bombast. It was, as Manuel Machado says, a revolution carried out inversely. It was the revolution of good taste and logic against the fantastic and unreal. It was a revolution from above carried out in favour of the new ideals inspired by Ibsen and Becque. Benavente in this play adopts the system of Becque in giving 'tranches de vie' instead of working out his play according to the theories of Scribe: he also follows Ibsen in making the climax of his play show the revolt of woman against the conventions and hypocrisies of society. But Benavente did not write this play as a profession of feminism, for he introduces his pure heroine only in the fourth act. His primary intention was to satirize the corrupt society of Madrid.

The result of the Civil Wars in Spain during the nineteenth century had been to create a new society which was without solidity or political consistency. The decline so noticeable in Spanish literature in the later years of the century was a proof that the power

[1] Comedia produced 21st Oct. 1896.

and wealth of the country were in the hands of a society which was witnessing the downfall of Spanish colonial power amidst the clatter of castanets and bull-fights. We can thus understand the hostility which greeted Benavente's pungent satire, and it is easy to see why he changed the name of the play from *Todo Madrid* to *Gente Conocida*. In the first act, through eight scenes, we get brilliant effects of dialogue bringing out the corruption of the aristocracy and their spendthrift customs. It is thus that the young Duque de Garellano pictures the nobility of modern Spain to his mother the Duchess who belongs to 'la vieille école'. 'In your days, Mother, the aristocracy shone with the lustre of its titles. To-day a title is possessed by any one; they are given and sold for nothing: of the man who has money and knows how to spend it, no questions are asked. Just wait and see what happens to Montes once he is married to his clever little Petra. With her to pull the strings, he will be thought far more of in Madrid than we are; his house will be a smarter rendezvous than ours, and his daughter, that illegitimate daughter of his who is heiress to an immense fortune, will marry whomever she likes—the most blue-blooded aristocrat, even me—if I think it worth while!' Every scene shows by subtle touches the frivolous 'inconscience' of these members of the smart set: Benavente makes them jerk and dance through their follies like puppets. Hilario Montes, the rich upstart, knows the power of his wealth and is determined that it shall bring him influence and titles. He is the only one who is not bored with life, for he is a man of action. The Countess del Fondelvalle has great hopes that Montes, with whom she has had an intrigue, will make her daughter Fernanda heiress to his wealth. The young Duke Henry del Garellano who is engaged to Fernanda has the same hope. But Montes has a young natural daughter Angelita, whom

he desires to recognize as his heiress. Duke Henry, when he hears that Montes has made Angelita his heiress, makes love to the young girl. The plans of Hilario Montes and his wife, the astute adventuress Petra Uriarte, seem about to triumph ; they will be united to the most aristocratic house in Madrid by the marriage of Angelita with the Duke. But unfortunately Montes, for all his cunning, had not counted on the Ibsenian heroine. Angelita is a young lady who has been brought up far away from the corrupt air of the capital. She is shocked by the bitter tongues of the society gossips, and she also guesses the truth of her own origin. She tells Petra that she will not become a tool for furthering the ends of these selfish people. Then in order to clear the air of all this cloud of falsehoods she exposes the Duke before the assembled guests. Her words have the same ring as those of Norah or Rebecca West. 'Ah! I knew that you would not face the scandal! you fear it as the assassin fears blood. And here is this society which weaves scandalous falsehoods, all the while whispering, smiling : it does not assassinate nor kill at one blow but little by little by pinpricks.' Petra, the ambitious social climber, hoped to obtain the wealth of Montes and the Duke's title, but she had not counted on Angelita. The girl refuses to be handed over to a man she does not love : she is alone but she is strong in her self-confidence. She is a girl without the vanity of Fernanda ; love for her is an ideal and she refuses to throw away this pearl even to please her father who has all the old notions with regard to the obedience of daughters. But Angelita is not the first character to break the iron bonds which were enslaving Spanish woman ; she is a younger sister of the heroine in Gaspar's play, *La Huelga de Los Hijos*, which was produced in 1892. Gaspar makes his heroine, Henny, expound to the public the Ibsenian theories concerning the freedom of women. Henny,

by noble sincerity, contrasts with her capricious cousin Julia in the same way as Angelita and Fernanda. But Benavente has only given a sketch of Angelita: she appears too late in the drama for us to know her intimately. She is only one of the accessories to the play, not the central figure. Petra Uriarte and the Countess Ramona are the two moving spirits in the play: they are both passionate, ambitious women, both are gifted with a talent for unsavoury intrigue. In fact, they resemble one another too closely and consequently become wearisome. Hilario Montes is the best-drawn type in the play. Laden with riches, he watches with amusement all the society folk run after him. It amuses him to think that all the old titled nobility can be bought for money.

Benavente published an article on his play the day after the first performance, in which he admitted that it was composed of a series of scenes which in truth do not constitute a theatrical work, and that in technique he had followed the system dear to the modern French authors such as Lavedan. The moral of the play he explained thus: 'the aristocracy of cleverness, of talent, of politics, of tricks, plays with the aristocracy of race and money, and exploits them to its advantage; but it is powerless before the aristocracy of the individual, with the woman who is alone in her strength and whose conscience awakes amidst so many sleeping consciences.'

If *Gente Conocida* showed the aristocratic families in their decadence, the next play, *La Comida de Las Fieras*,[1] unfolds the sad spectacle of ruined noble families forced to sell their heirlooms. In the first scene we see the hall of a beautiful palace full of furniture set out and numbered for auction. It is the palace of the famous Casa de Cerinola. Throughout the whole of the first act the stage is crowded with people all taking

[1] Comedia produced 7th Nov. 1898.

part in brilliant dialogue. There is no dramatic action, nothing but a witty display of Benaventian irony. The characters presented might be divided into two main types—the impecunious nobleman and the *nouveau riche* profiteer. We hear that all Madrid is watching with curiosity a newly married pair who are giving the most brilliant functions and spending a mint of money. The husband Hipólito has made a fortune in the Argentine where he met his wife, and is now disconcerting the Madrid world of business by his erratic dealings on the Stock Exchange, whilst she dazzles every one by her brilliant 'toilettes'. In the second Act the scene takes place in Hipólito's house where a big reception is being held. For the first time in Benavente's works we meet the peculiar type of which, later, we shall be presented with so many examples—the 'mouthpiece' who utters all the author's theories and explains the working of the play. He is always a man of the world, a bachelor, ironical but suave, always keeping his ear agog for the gossip of Madrid life. He is equally at home in the study of the master of the house or in the boudoir of the lady; the secrets of his patron's bank balance are known to him no less than the secrets of the 'alcove'. In this play the character takes the name Tomillares, and under his guidance we learn what exists beneath the brilliant appearances of that society. He is the 'Madrileño legítimo' and he describes himself thus:

'We Madrid men cannot aspire to be more than maîtres d'hôtel, interpreters or cicerones in this immense hotel of Madrid, where people from all parts, live and camp . . . I think that I play my part marvellously well; I am rather like the retailer, who comes between the producer and the consumer; I facilitate social relationships, I am the talking chronicle . . . in one day I run over all Madrid and carry the political news to the theatre, the theatre news to 'Change, the Bull fight news to the ministers coming from the Council and the Council news to the bull fighters . . . those in the wings eagerly expect

me to find out if there is a political crisis and people wait for me in the Ministry to know if the new play was a success. Ladies ask me for news about . . . other ladies, and those others for news of the former . . . I enter everywhere like the newspaper—the Voice of Madrid—that is not a bad nickname is it? For that is what I am and what I shall be until my death—the Man about town.'

Such a passage is enough to prove how characteristically 'Madrileño' Benavente is in his plays in spite of his assimilation of French technique. Spanish dramatists have always made use of the 'mouthpiece' character, and the dramatists senior to Benavente, such as Gaspar and Galdós, were no exceptions.

Amidst all the gaiety and luxury of this big reception we hear bad news about Hipólito's business. He is in the hands of acute, dishonest speculators, and his credit is failing. Those who are crowding round his hospitable table, partaking of his hospitality, are thinking how they can cheat him of everything. Don Fernán, one of Hipólito's guests, a rich business man who suggests Hilario Montes by his brutal frankness, is reckoning on buying the house cheap when Hipólito fails. All luck leaves the unhappy pair, who watch the creditors seize their goods, and see their former friends spurn them. There is nothing for them to do but leave the country and start life afresh. But Victoria gathers strength in proportion as her husband becomes discouraged and by her love forces his eyes from the ghosts of the past. Henceforth it will be a struggle, but an easier one, for the troubles will be divided between husband and wife. Tomillares sums up the moral idea of the play in his epigrammatic style:

'Human society is naturally democratic and tends to equality; only with difficulty does it tolerate that anyone should rise above the common mean; in order to achieve power it is necessary that one should have a force; whether talent, beauty, or riches; around that force, frightened rather than respectful, revolve men like badly tamed wild beasts;

but the tamer sees to it that they are well fed, and power opens up its destinies, wealth its functions, talent its works, and the beasts appear to be tame ; until one day the force fails, the talent decays, the beauty grows old, the power crumbles away, the money disappears—and on that day, oh ! you can be sure, the most savoury meal of the wild beasts will be the tamer himself.'

Largely owing to the fact that Benavente took as title of his play *The Banquet of the Wild Beasts*, some Spanish writers have accused him of plagiarizing Curel's play *Le Repas du Lion*.[1] Señor Gómez Carrillo in *El Libro Popular* formulated this accusation. As a result, Don Enrique Amado, a friend of Benavente, read the work of Curel before the members of the Ateneo, Madrid, and it was established that there was no real similarity. Benavente himself answered the accusation in an article included in his volume of 'Acotaciones' which appeared in 1914 and showed that, in regard to translations, adaptations, and 'sources', he had always carried scrupulousness to the point of giving credit to others for plays which, by reason of their plan, their characters, all that constitutes the originality of a work, might have been called original. It is difficult to understand on what grounds Benavente's detractors based their charges. The play of François de Curel was written to put forward the thesis that capitalists are indispensable to the state. 'Individualism', says the hero, Jean de Miremont, 'mitigates its evils by the gifts which it bestows on humanity. It is not the crowd that thinks, organizes, invents, creates ; it is man alone, more energetic and more intelligent than the sum of the rest !' Benavente in his play was not trying to prove any thesis ; he simply observes coldly and leaves us to draw our conclusions. If there is any ulterior purpose in his mind, it was to prove that the *nouveau riche* society which had evolved

[1] Produced 26th November 1897.

during the later years of the nineteenth century was utterly egotistical and corrupt. There is no more thesis in Benavente's work than there is in *La Parisienne* or *Les Corbeaux*.

Victoria, the heroine of *The Banquet of the Wild Beasts*, is the first of the true Benaventian heroines. She stands in glorious contrast against the gloomy background of male characters, and it is only by her noble example that she gives hope to her husband Hipólito. She has all the practical optimism of the heroines of Martínez Sierra, some of whom she resembles. Hipólito, like all the rest of the male characters, is weakened by failure: he is crushed by the economic difficulties of life in European cities. 'Why did we come to Europe,' he says; 'in America man signifies something; he is a force, a guarantee; he struggles, yes, but with primitive pride: when he falls it is possible to lift himself up again; but in this ancient society, position is all, man is nothing . . . once conquered, it is useless to return to the struggle. Here wealth is an end, not a means, for realizing great enterprises. Wealth is ease; over there it is activity. Over there money brings triumph and here disaster.' These words of Hipólito sum up the author's views as put forward in these early plays; he wants to complete the work initiated by the great Pérez Galdós, to turn the eyes of Spain on itself. New ideas must be imported, new activities must gradually drive out the whole mass of antiquated conventions upheld by an unstable society.

If in *The Banquet of Wild Beasts* we have as central figure a pure and heroic Victoria, in the next play, *La Gata de Angora* (the Angora Cat),[1] we get a powerfully drawn picture of the frivolous woman of the world suggesting Madame Moraines in Paul Bourget's *Mensonges*. The title of the play seems to have been

[1] Comedia produced 31st March 1900.

taken from a poem in *Versos* called 'La Gata de Angora', the last lines of which are:

> Así, reina oriental, tendida quedas,
> en curva airosa el cuerpo abandonado
> y el blanco cuerpo, armiño inmaculado,
> parece hecho de neve, pluma y seda.

Silvia is the Angora Cat, beautiful in her white dress, but with something feline in her expression. It is thus that Aurelio sees her when he paints her picture—the picture that is to make him famous. Aurelio is a young artist of high ideals who lives modestly with his sister Josefina, and gives himself up with passion to his art. Josefina is devoted and has helped and encouraged him in the lean days when pictures had to be sold in the cafés and in the streets. He is in despair over his picture of Silvia, because he wants to symbolize in it the brilliance of society. Attracted by the glitter of that world of which he knows nothing he cannot understand that artists draw their inspiration from poverty and sadness. Such privations have only the effect of lowering his courage. Silvia is to him the symbol of that aristocratic elegance which exalts him to inspiration. When he enters her brilliantly lit drawing-room how easily he forgets his modest studio where he lives with Josefina! Aurelio suggests Stefano, the hero of Roberto Bracco's brilliant play, *Piccola Fonte*.[1] Stefano is a struggling poet, married to a modest, humble little wife Teresa. Under the influence of a sincere love he reveals his talent and becomes famous. Then little by little his good character becomes perverted to calculating egoism owing to the flattery he receives in the world of fashion. In *La Femme Nue* of Henry Bataille we see also points of resemblance with Benavente's play.[2] Bernier wins the medal at the Salon des Champs Elysées for his picture 'la femme nue' which he had painted

[1] Produced 1905. [2] Produced 1908.

under the inspiration of his wife and model, Loulou Cassagne. As soon as he becomes famous he finds that his wife by her lack of the *convenances* spoils his social ambitions: she has not the aristocratic charm of La Princesse de Chabran, to whom he pays court. In the three plays the moral seems to be:

> Un poète mort jeune à qui
> l'homme survit.

Stefano, Bernier, and Aurelio all produce their best work when they are poor and when their love is sincere. As soon as they enter the painted salons of society their muse declines. Pepe, the friend of Aurelio, sees the dangers to which the fashionable artist is exposed, and it is thus that he answers Aurelio's question as to whether the artist should live in society:

> 'In society, yes; in a society, no. Judge for yourself how much better you painted when you could claim detachment, when you were never driven to see these women at close range. Now you are becoming affected, you flatter without knowing it; you have ceased to see with the artist's eye. It is natural; you are seeking before anything the most direct, the nearest applause, the applause of the circle around you; you are sacrificing your sincere feeling for art to this immediate result.'

If Stefano and Bernier had possessed an outspoken friend like Pepe, *Piccola Fonte* and *La Femme Nue* would have ended not as tragedies but as comedy like *La Gata de Angora*. There is no doubt that the Benaventian play has not the passionate qualities of Bracco or Bataille's art. It is a coldly intellectual play, written not to produce emotion but rather to observe satirically that white elegance of a perverted society. Aurelio, as Pepe tells him, is not an artist of strong inspiration: he has not much personality and his temperament is that of a lover rather than of an artist. His art is all sweetness, feminine, with a touch about it of coquetry. He recalls René Vincy, the young poet in

Paul Bourget's book, *Mensonges*, who attempts suicide when he learns how unfaithful Madame Moraines is : Aurelio, in a similar position, destroys the picture he had painted under the passionate inspiration of Silvia's beauty. The picture he is to exhibit will be of another woman ; a picture without soul. Yet it is Silvia who buys this picture of the Angora Cat and Aurelio has the mortification of having to accept her patronage.

There is more subtle pessimism in the study of Aurelio's shattered ideals than there is in all Bataille's passionate play. The young artist has had to destroy his inspired picture in order to save Silvia from worldly scandal ; in addition he has to hearken to Pepe's words of worldly advice and to accept remuneration for the emasculate, soulless picture from Silvia herself. Pepe, a nineteenth-century Philinte, argues with ruthless logic and triumphs over this weak Alceste.

Benavente has softened the end of the play by the scene with Josefina, the beloved sister whose existence Aurelio had forgotten in his search for Silvia. Josefina will give him consolation and a purpose in life—what matter the fall of ideals from their marble pedestals when there is a nobler affection worth living for ? ' To-day,' he says, ' more than ever do I need to know that I live for somebody, that there is another life which needs me.' There is even more pessimism in this play than in *Gente Conocida* or *La Comida de Las Fieras* : Aurelio with his idealism protests like Alfred de Vigny's Stello against ' la realité douloureuse '. He seems to be a fully evolved offspring of the young poet in Benavente's early sketch, *Amor de Artista* (contained in *Teatro Fantástico*), and with him he might ask : ' ¿ A qué hacer sainete para la risa de los demás, lo que es tragedia en mi corazón ? '

Each new production brought Benavente increasing notoriety. At first there was an outcry against the

cynicism of his plays, and the favourite criticism applied to them was that they were immoral. This only proved in what a superficial way plays like *La Gata de Angora* had been judged. Accustomed still to the red romantic plays of Echegeray or the moral sententiousness of Tamayo, the critics were unable to appreciate this fine, new irony which, like a Toledo blade, was piercing the follies of Spanish Society. Benavente had the same moral purpose as Galdós in writing for the stage, but he adopted different methods. Both men wished to fix the attention of Spaniards on the conditions of their own country, but whereas Galdós, the liberal by temperament, inspired by ideas of freedom, had been able to emancipate himself, Benavente, the conservative, clung still to the ancient traditions of the past. In the optimism of Galdós's *La Loca de La Casa* and *Voluntad* we see a great contrast to the decadent pessimism of the early Benaventian plays. Both writers saw the same problems, but the one set out at once to prescribe a cure for the ills, the other showed the nature of the disease, and distrusting in his powers of healing, preferred to conceal his lack of skill in irony—that irony which he has defined as sadness which cannot weep and therefore smiles.

In *Lo Cursi*[1] Benavente took the sides of the bourgeoisie against the new aesthetic snobbery which was rising amongst the intellectuals. The derivation of the word 'cursi' has been given by Juan Valera. He says that it was originally a local word of Cádiz and was applied as a nickname to the daughters of a poor tailor there called Sicur, who used to go about grotesquely dressed. The syllables of the word were then changed round and it was applied by extension to all that is poor and aspires to be distinguished and 'de bon ton'. The object of Benavente in this play

[1] Comedia produced 19th Jan. 1901.

was to satirize the new Bohemians in literature who applied the word 'cursi' to everything that was admired by the 'bourgeois'. Rafael Altamira in his essay on the literature of Spain during the Regency has shown that modernism with its reaction against the naturalists was tainted with that against which it was trying to react. For one thing, it inherited a tendency to eroticism, which became exaggerated to a pitch unheard of in the time of Zola. The effect of these books was to slacken the rules and conventions of morality. Modernism introduced a dangerous renewal of sentimental romanticism. It is characteristic of the generation succeeding the naturalists that they made us think of the romantic heroes of Murger, Musset, Baudelaire, and Larra.[1] In France the solid 'bourgeois' school of Augier and Zola was followed by 'exquisite' temperaments like those of Verlaine and Mallarmé with their melancholy soul-searchings; in Spain the moralist drama of Tamayo and Ayala and the romantic drama of Echegeray had been succeeded by the generation of 1898 eager to lash at the 'aburguesamiento' of literature. The spirit of the dandy becomes apparent and writers turn their thoughts to literary exquisites such as Baudelaire and Barbey D'Aurevilly. Though literary men did not go in for the brilliant waistcoats of Gautier or the high sounding names of Petrus Borel, they affected a consciously original appearance in order to startle the unimaginative crowd. Writers like Ramón Del Valle Inclán tried to astonish or to mystify. Anatole France's remark about Barbey, which he puts into the mouth of St. Peter when the author of *Les Diaboliques* arrived at the gate of heaven, is true of many of the modernists in Spain:

'He wanted to have every vice, but he was unable to do so, because that is very difficult and you need special talents for it; he would have wished to cover himself with crimes because

[1] Cf. R. Altamira, *Psicología y Literatura*, Madrid, 1905.

crime is picturesque, but he remained the best fellow on earth, and his life was almost monastic. He said some horrible things, it is true, but as he did not believe them, and did not make anyone else believe them, it was never anything but literature and the fault is pardonable.'[1]

It is significant that on the 13th February 1901, about a fortnight after the production of Benavente's play, a group of young writers, including Pío Baroja and Martínez Ruiz (Azorín) went with bunches of violets in their hands to the tomb of José de Larra in Madrid, and in a speech read at the graveside proclaimed Larra as the master of the youth of 1898.[2] Larra the revolutionary, Larra the artist, was the inveterate enemy of the 'bourgeois'. Benavente himself belonged to the generation of 1898, but he had never been in the forefront of the modernists: rather must we look on him as a link with the past generation, and in *Lo Cursi* he satirizes bitterly the new spirit of freedom which was undermining the cardinal virtues of Spain.

Agustín, the hero of the play, who has lived in Madrid all his life, is imbued with the modern spirit; he is curious of everything as if he wished to live in one instant all his past and all his future life. He desires to experience every sensation, and thus symbolizes both the literary and social tendencies of the new century. Rosario is a girl from the country, born and bred in the austere silence of an ancestral palace. Like Leonard Merrick's heroine, Cynthia, she does her best to follow the nimble spirit of her husband. Agustín wants her to be the modern wife who keeps to herself as much as possible and does not trouble her husband. But Rosario, the poor country thing, strives in vain to keep pace with her husband's 'modern' friends. Valiantly she tries to win the

[1] A. France, *Garden of Epicurus*; tr. by A. Allinson, London, 1923.
[2] Cf. Azorín, *Rivas y Larra*, Madrid, 1921.

approval of Agustín and even stifles her jealousy when she sees that he is becoming *épris* of his cousin Lola, for she has heard that it is the worst crime of bad taste to be jealous of one's husband. Just then the traditional figure of Don Juan looms into sight. It is Carlos, one of the *blasé* young 'Madrileños'—a curious type, the terror of husbands—Don Juan, Byron and the Devil rolled into one—a seducer, remorseless, cynical. Relying on this fear of the commonplace and the vulgar, he weaves his plot to entangle Rosario. Agustín, enveloped in his egotistical interests, leaves Rosario alone and pays his attentions to the flighty Lola. Rosario then determines to make Agustín jealous by pretending to listen to the proposals of Carlos, and in the end she triumphs over him and makes him return to her. The egoist agrees at last that goodness is never vulgar.

The production of this play, with its biting sarcasm against the social, literary ideals of the time, came as a surprise to many who considered Benavente as a leader of the moderns. He had been the editor of *La Vida Literaria*, the review which trumpeted forth the new ideals of 1898. But Benavente by his temperament was not a passionate modernist. In spite of his assimilation of modern literary theories there has always been in him a basis of conservatism. Thus we find that he gazes sardonically at the new ideas which were gradually changing life in Spain. What the marquis says to Felix might have been said by Benavente to the modern writers: 'What you are writing, believe me, is chamber music, whereas what we now need are loud blares on the trumpets; those of Jericho are not enough: we need those of the Last Judgement.'

The plays we have considered were all written to satirize the customs of Madrid at the end of the century; but Benavente also turned his attention to the provinces—to those towns which became the

lawful prey of the Madrid officials. *La Farándula*,[1] *La Gobernadora*,[2] and *El Primo Román*[3] lay bare the evils of 'Caciquismo', or the 'boss' system. In the first two plays, detail after detail draws us into closer touch with the country town of Moraleda, the abode of all that is backward and conventional. As usual with Benavente there is very little plot in the conventional dramatic sense, but all the little incidents are so cleverly correlated and connected that we feel as if we were citizens of the town. We get to know the characters who throng the stage, whether the scene represents a crowded café or a bull ring. The plays have no resemblance to the old-fashioned drama of intrigue, but approach nearer to the art of the cinematograph in being able to bring before our eyes a series of brilliant photographic scenes. *El Primo Román* differs from *La Farándula* and *La Gobernadora* in that the purpose of the play is not altogether to satirize: it approaches the type of sentimental comedy of a type that has since become so familiar in Spain owing to the talent of the Brothers Quintero.

Benavente in these plays does not attack one side or the other; he prefers to remain neutral. In *La Farándula*, Don Gonzalo, one of the aspiring politicians from Madrid, is at Moraleda with his suite. He is staying at the house of a rich man of the district, Juan Manuel—a worthy type, fit to be bled by politicians. Gonzalo, by his sentimentality, his long-winded platitudes, suggests very forcibly Tom Broadbent in Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*. His secretary, Aurelio, the hero, from his first ironical words reveals himself as the author himself. He was a hack journalist who has been picked up by Gonzalo and used for his electioneering campaign. But Aurelio's critical remarks

[1] Comedia produced 30th Nov. 1897.
[2] Comedia produced 8th Oct. 1901.
[3] Comedia produced 12th Nov. 1901.

and lack of enthusiasm for politics are soon seen. 'I placed my intelligence', he says, 'at the service of Don Gonzalo's party just as the workman puts his hands at the service of the master who pays him. What does he care about the fate of the house which he raises up? He is told to open a door and he opens it; he is told to knock down that enclosure and he knocks it down; the pen is not a nobler instrument of work than the trowel.' After one season of electioneering in the provinces he is completely disillusioned, for everywhere he finds the same comedy being acted—the eternal speech which begins with a salutation to the province; historical recollections, monuments, invocation to the patron or patroness of the locality . . . phrases about the catholic country *par excellence*, the venerable traditions, &c. Then the salutation to the fair sex with the assurance that the last women seen are the most beautiful. Afterwards the patriotic hymn is sung and the march of Cádiz played. When that is over, Gonzalo gives the people a little arithmetic, an English paragraph, a heap of statistics . . . 99 per cent., 49 out of 50, &c.; then finally, when there is an opposition, 'Long live Liberty first of all', then 'Long live the Monarchy'. Thus the same performance goes on from place to place like the ancient 'Farándula'.[1]

Benavente in the two acts of *La Farándula* only drew a rough sketch, but in the three acts of *La Gobernadora* he produced a complete play, in the opinion of many critics the most perfect of his early works. It marks an epoch in his development for it sums up the qualities of Benavente the satirist. No play is more malicious in intention; it is as if the author had deliberately tried to write a play crowded

[1] The Farándula was a travelling theatrical company of a type common in Spain. It consisted of three women, seven men or more, and gave representations in villages. Cf. *Viaje Entretenido*, by Agustín de Rojas; written in 1602.

with characters, not one of whom arouses any affection in the audience. In *La Farándula* the satire is bitter and Benavente uses Aurelio as a mouthpiece for all his disdain of political intrigues; but Aurelio, though he has sold his intelligence to the first man who wishes to utilize it, yet rates his heart at a higher price. He is the amiable cynic, that product of modern civilization, whose cynicism is an armour which conceals a sensitive heart. In *La Gobernadora* we are in difficulty if we try to ascertain who is the biggest scoundrel—the Governor, his wife, or the secretary. Benavente's characters with their fatalism often resemble those of Capus—the master in drama of the *déclassés*. The more sublimely 'inconscient' his characters are, the greater their success. The favours of fortune never fall to the lot of the laborious, the honest. Capus better than any writer understood the disarray of our times when society, as a character says in *La Veine*, is like a gaming house. In these days, since nothing is in its place, we may expect anything. Our will is only the toy of circumstances; our energy, our tenacity, all are myths; our influence on our destiny is nil, for men are puppets and it is hazard that pulls the strings. Capus thus, with a charming optimism (at least in appearance), plays with his characters like the wonderful Italian manipulators of the *Teatro Dei Piccoli*, and makes them perform the most amazing tricks. Benavente does not show any of the optimism of Capus in playing with his puppets; he does not smile as he works; rather does he let his features contract into a sardonic grin. The first act of the play takes place in the big square of Moraleda, the centre of the town's social life, the rendezvous of all the young dandies of the town when they are fatigued with gambling in the Casino. There is very little action in this act of exposition, but Benavente introduces us to an immense crowd of characters who throng the stage in a way that recalls

the Spanish dramas of the golden age. By sly touches here and there we learn all the gossip about the celebrities of the town: it is Damián the waiter serving coffee to customers in the square, who introduces the characters as they pass by. We hear that Don Santiago, the Governor, is altogether under the power of his wife Josefina, and that Josefina is very interested in Santiago's secretary, Manolo. Every one is talking about the coming production of a rather subversive play, *Obscurantismo*. The people are eager for the play to be produced, but the upper classes, mostly dominated by the dignitaries of the Church, wish to prevent it owing to its liberal tendencies. Josefina, under the influence of the archbishop and the women's league, persuades her vacillating husband to forbid the production, even though the play is not contrary to the law. She is imperious with Santiago. In the second act we get a glimpse of family life in the Governor's House. The Governor's clerks have no time to attend to Government business, as they are running errands for Josefina, arranging flowers in vases for the coming reception. Her smart gowns from Madrid lie strewn all over the writing tables—in a word, it is the house of the typically weak Benaventian hero. Josefina has the strong personality of the modern theatrical heroine who has taken her degrees in Ibsenism; she has in fact absorbed all the dangerous notions of the Northern master. It is, however, her will-power which has advanced Santiago, and she does not let him forget that like the spider she has carried him on her back. When Santiago says that he fears a riot if he forbids the production of the political play, she answers: 'What are you saying about riots and risings? The masses are like women: they need a man of character who will impose his will on them, by force if necessary.' Santiago has no will, but Manolo the secretary has, and Josefina is irresistibly

attracted to him. Manolo is one of those smart, eager young men who spend their lean days in the great capitals waiting for the wheel of fortune to turn. By good luck he has been taken up by Don Santiago, and following the example of all ambitious young men he ingratiates himself with the Governor's wife. Like many other cynics of Benavente's theatre he seems to be a descendant of the 'Periquillo El de Las Gallineras' and other heroes of the Picaresque Novels. The advance of centuries has dulled his brilliance, but it has made him fatter and more prosperous. In the modern world he has become a brother of the 'Brasseur' of Capus and other 'égoistes sans arrière pensée'.

Manolo finds support for his ambitions in Josefina; she determines to make him marry Esperanza, the daughter of Don Baldomero—the rich *cacique* of Moraleda, who hold mortgages over half the province and I.O.U.'s signed by the other half. But Don Baldomero has a quarrel with Manolo and threatens to disclose letters compromising him and Josefina if he does not leave Moraleda. Manolo then determines that he will fight Baldomero the capitalist, by making Josefina persuade Santiago to allow the production of the play. Thus the people will be brought over to the Government's side by this Liberal policy and the Governor's position will be strengthened, especially as at that moment there is danger of imminent crisis in the Government at Madrid, owing to the predominating influence of the Liberals.

'The country', he says, 'is disturbed; there are disorders in several provinces; it will be necessary to suspend the constitutional guarantees, and when liberties are to be suppressed, you know, a liberal government is the one best able to do it; it always inspires more confidence. Besides, we are in the Autumn; there are two dangerous periods in the year for every Government: the summer season and the fall, when people change their clothes. Thousands of families in the opposition, anxious to take baths in the summer, and thousands

needing change of clothes in the fall, make up a force which only needs the slightest pretext in order to overthrow any government.'

Manolo might be called the 'Pícaro' of politics, and by one of those wonderful coincidences which occur on the stage, it is his long-lost brother Paco who turns out to be the impresario of the company playing *Obscurantismo*. Paco also has been the plaything of fortune, struggling in enterprises amidst stage actors no sincerer than the political actors Manolo has to deal with. 'For my brother as for me,' he says, 'the best comedy is that which gives livelihood.' Manolo, though he is the symbol of the worst kind of egoism of the modern world, yet rises to great heights of indignation against society, since he is the mouthpiece for Benavente's acrid sarcasm directed against the injustices of the ruling classes. Take, for example, the following tirade:

'And now as I wear this "bourgeois" livery, I should be a traitor and a coward if I did not stand at the Governor's side against this society of Tartuffes who pretend to defend ideas when they are merely defending their interests. Liberty, patriotism, religion—these are fine words which serve them as trench or barricade behind which to defend their egotistical interests, their social position, their salaries, even their gambling dens.'

The play concludes with Manolo's triumph, and we are left speculating as to the relations between the members of this *ménage à trois*. Poor, unsuspecting Don Santiago as he looks out from his box on the arena crowded with people watching eagerly the victorious thrusts of the matador cannot help saying: 'What an afternoon, what days! A people that within half an hour hisses me, applauds me, cheers in the name of Liberty, acclaims a bull fighter, shouts to the ladies, then commences to hiss again and then to applaud—how is one to govern them?'

In considering the early plays of Benavente we cannot but be struck by the contrast they bear in con-

struction to the type of drama which preceded them. Right up to Benavente Spanish drama was under the domination of the well-made play of the Scribe pattern, for even Gaspar, though he introduced innovations in style and dialogue in *Las Personas Decentes*, yet conformed to the older construction. Even Galdós, as late as *Electra* in 1901, introduced a ghost to help the *dénouement*. With Benavente all the old tricks of lost rings, letters, handkerchiefs, disappear, and the play develops on the Becque pattern. But there is a great difference between the economy of the French descendant of Racine, and the profuse methods of the Spaniard, born of the lineage of Lope de Vega. Spanish drama, like English, has always welcomed the thronged stage. In the days of Shakespeare and Lope de Vega the stages in these two countries represented plays that were pageants. We have only to recall *Midsummer Night's Dream* or the *Comedias de Asuntos de La Historia Patria*. Mr. Archer in his book *Playmaking* shows how *Hamlet* contains twenty-six characters, when in reality only six were necessary to the action. 'It would be perfectly possible', he says, 'to write a *Hamlet* after the manner of Racine, in which there should be only six personages instead of Shakespeare's twenty-six.'[1] In modern drama with the improved scenic conditions a playwright is at perfect liberty to develop his play with few or many characters. In *El Nido Ajeno* Benavente works out a very moving psychological study with a cast of four. But looking over the plays of this period we see that very rarely has he adopted the economic method. Inevitably by instinct he seems always to have gone back to the national tradition. When comparing his work with that of José Echegeray we find that he has none of that wonderful skill for working out mathematically and tidily a plot, which was such a virtue in the author of *El Gran Galeoto*. Benavente

[1] Cf. W. Archer, *Playmaking*, ch. v, pp. 59, London, 1912.

seems always to write and develop his theme with difficulty, and he needs many characters with whom to conceal the springs of his action. The first acts of his plays are generally full of movement and bustle. The first act of *La Gobernadora* is a good example. It is very long and yet nothing definite happens. We see the square at Moraleda and watch the people wandering about. Little by little we get to know the chief persons of the town, and from the waiter we hear all the gossip. Many first acts of the author are like that. His method centred in dialogue, and by scraps of conversation bandied about from lip to lip, he explained the characters in the play. Often the true plot does not begin until the second act, and the first performs the functions of an overture to create the atmosphere. In many plays it is a pity that he was not able to follow more closely the economy of French drama, but there is no doubt that dullness is avoided by the introduction of secondary characters who by means of varied episodes rouse the interest of the audience. Such a method has been followed by Roberto Bracco in plays like *Sperduti nel Buio* or *Il Diritto di Vivere*.

It is in dialogue, however, that we notice the wonderful skill of the early satiric plays. The running fire of epigrams and smart sallies in *Gente Conocida* or *Lo Cursi* is worthy of Oscar Wilde at his best. Benavente, like the great English wit, was able to throw off at a minute's notice the most profound aphorisms on life. It is a tendency natural to the Spaniard who has inherited from centuries of ancestors the love of the 'phrase'. The effect of Benavente's satire in these plays is nearly always obtained by lightning flashes of wit—but often the cascade of epigrams has very little to do with the situation in the play. We often feel that the young Benaventian wits are straining like the young men of our Restoration comedy for effect, and would willingly lose their honour for a *mot*. We

notice also in the plays after 1901 a tendency towards euphuistic expression that was afterwards to spoil much of Benavente's work. Spanish, like English, drama, has always suffered from affected conceits of language. But Góngora left a deeper impress on the language of his people than did the writer of Euphues. Benavente, in plays like *Gata de Angora* and *La Gobernadora*, did not show this taint of Gongorism very clearly, but we do notice its appearance in passages where he wants to draw a moral. He then falls into the same stilted language that we find in parts of the early Pinero plays. However we should always remember that 'style', as Mr. Archer says, 'is the sifting of common speech', and even common speech in Spain is crammed with proverbs and pieces of old folk-lore. Benavente seems to promise his auditors, as Aristophanes did, that if they retain the ideas of the comic poet carefully, as they keep dried fruit in boxes, 'their garments shall smell odoriferous of wisdom throughout the year'.

When we reflect on the vivacious brilliance of these comedies which depends mostly on satire, we must admit that if Benavente did nothing else, he certainly inspired the people of Madrid with the ideal of modern comedy. The public that was quick-witted enough to welcome *Lo Cursi* and *La Gobernadora* was bound to be sensitively capable of appreciating the most refined comedy in the world. As George Meredith has shown, cultivated men and women who do not skim the cream of life, and are attached to the duties, yet escape the harsher blows, make acute and balanced observers, and Benavente may be called the Molière of that class in modern Spain.[1]

[1] Cf. G. Meredith, *Essay on Comedy*.

II. Plays of Middle-Class Life

In his early plays Benavente presented incisive studies of Spanish society, but he was often, as George Meredith would say, ' a social scavenger, working on a storage of bile '. As he grew older, however, he became less bitter, developing slowly but quite certainly from a satirist to a humorist. ' Genuine humour and true wit ', says Landor, ' require a sound and capacious mind, which is always a grave one,' and Benavente's laughter in these more mature comedies often touches on the tragic. Instead of skimming the surface of life as he saw it, he now tries to probe the hidden depths of society, to reach the fundamental causes of the great problems of life. Society appears to him as it did to Ibsen to be supported by pillars that stand on a foundation of lying and corruption. Benavente, however, has not the *saeva indignatio* of Ibsen—but rather a grey, misty pessimism from which he takes refuge in his doctrine of renunciation. Ibsen had faith in the regeneration of man by truth, and he rises like a giant in glorious rebellion against the falsity of society. Benavente, like Paul Géraldy, is the poet of *les petites âmes*—who can never rise from humdrum existence to breathe the rarer air on mountain tops. He shows the falsity of the conventions of society, the egoism of men, the cruel logic of modern life, but he offers no real solution.

This group may be divided into two parts, each containing two plays. Of the first, *El Hombrecito* and *Rosas de Otoño* describe life of the upper middle class at Madrid, where money is plentiful, life easy, and men are bored. Of the last, *Por Las Nubes* and *La Losa de Los Sueños* descend for subject-matter to the lower middle class, where life is threadbare and difficult, where appearances must be kept up and respectability walks hungry.

In *El Hombrecito* and *Rosas de Otoño* there is a further development of Benavente's feministic opinions and we see the struggle in his mind between two ideas—the modern idea of Ibsen and the traditional idea always held by the Spanish woman. Nené, the heroine of the former play, is a vigorous modern girl who thinks for herself and wants to live her own life according to her own free choice. Benavente shows her to us in all her attractiveness and makes us believe that she will become a Nora, but at the end of the play convention and tradition triumph and Nené has to submit to failure. Isabel, the heroine of the latter play, has the misfortune to be married to a worthless rake who acts the don Juan until his grey hairs and increasing infirmities warn him that it is time to cease and turn to her for consolation. Many are the accusations launched by her and her passionate step-daughter against society which forces women to be the mere plaything of man that can be put aside when wearied of, but in the end she renounces all animus against her husband and welcomes his tardy love—' the roses of autumn,' as she says.

El Hombrecito [1]

The first scene of the play, with its brilliant dialogue, recalls the early satiric plays such as *Gente Conocida*. There are the same subtle sword thrusts, the same incisiveness of style. Pepita and Casilda ' full sail with their shoal of tools for tenders ' we have met before, but Nené is a new character. In contrast to Pepita and Casilda she is of serious disposition, and as her grandfather Juan Manuel says, she has always been called on that account ' the manikin ' (*el hombrecito*).

Like the heroines of Ibsen she struggles to emancipate herself from the primitive feelings that weigh

[1] Comedia produced 23rd March 1903.

down the majority of women. Nobler in character than her fellow women she tries to advance towards the realization of an ideal. Looking back at society she watches with disgust its ludicrous attempts to conceal its primitive passions. With Henri Bordeaux she would say: 'Toute la civilisation n'est qu'une apparence. Elle a perfectionné la jouissance, le bien-être, la luxure, elle n'a pas réussi à perfectionner la brute humaine.' It is with despair that she sees the primitive apparent on all sides: 'All intercourse in Society seems to me to be limited to one object; matrimonial combinations or love intrigues. On whatever pretext we meet, nothing else is thought of and every conversation turns on the same subject.' But Nené's outcry against society is not disinterested, for in reality it arises from her love for Enrique which she has renounced on discovering that he is a married man. Temptation, however, has been too strong for her and she continues to meet him. As with so many of his heroines Benavente accentuates this inner struggle between as it were two opposing demons. They all, these women of his, initiate a course of action, prepare to make a sacrifice that is above their powers, and in the end they have to give way panting to the demon of darkness. As a character says in another play: 'Our existence is composed and ordered as a work of art, but then life comes and jeers at us, poor ridiculous creatures that we are, dragging us blindly past our lying deceits, to the final truth which was always our will.' Nené, thinking that she possesses the nature of a Brünhilde, ready to defy Wotan, is eager to rebel against society. With this intention she writes a letter to Enrique asking him to come to her, for she is ready to leave her home and go away with him. At his side she will face the consequences of her action. When the decisive scene at the end of the play arrives and Enrique awaits her decision, Nené falters in her

resolve. All her courage leaves her and she ends by putting on again her mask of convention. She will follow the dictates of society, but secretly she will meet Enrique and carry on the intrigue.

Her last words to her friend Casilda show the revolution produced in her character: 'I have learnt how to live—as all of them do. Now you see, I accept life.' It would be difficult in all Benavente's works to discover a play that ends on a tone of deeper pessimism than this one. The satire that had seemed so brisk in this play becomes tragic. In this drama of a girl's soul smothered by life we no longer see the author as an ironic, passionless god, contemplating his creatures from the security of divine aloofness; rather does Benavente's spirit resemble that harsh, elfin humour of Pirandello which maliciously pulls to pieces the mechanism of any image raised by sentiment, in order to see how it is made.[1] And after pulling to pieces Nené's soul he forces her to creep back maimed and cowed to join in the farce of society. It recalls the case of *Cruelle Énigme* of Paul Bourget, another pitiless mechanic, where the last words spoken by the hero's mother reveal the tragedy: 'Il est comme les autres.'

The tragedy of *El Hombrecito* appears when Nené realizes that she must act, in future, the farce of society. She cannot renounce her love and yet she is unable to act with courage. Openly she will copy the other devotees of convention, but secretly she will follow her love. She had been ready to act sincerely and openly in defiance of society, but then her weakness came and she realized that the sacrifice of her good name was too great. There is no doubt that Ibsen would have exalted even to mystical heights the character of Nené, and would have made her depart with her lover, openly defying the conventions of the world. In the

[1] Cf. Pirandello, *Umorismo*, Firenze, 1920, p. 195.

earlier scenes she appears to have the strong, passionate nature of a Rebecca West aspiring towards the attainment with Enrique, of an ideal, but Benavente does not breathe the rarified air of the northern master; his heroine by her weak downfall is truer to life. And Becque, for all his pessimism, did not descend to deeper depths than Benavente in this play.

Rosas de Otoño [1]

In *El Hombrecito* Benavente showed in Nené the Nemesis of a character in rebellion against society, but in *Rosas de Otoño* he makes his heroine Isabel symbolize the ideal of resignation and sacrifice. The tragedy in the former play arises from the gradual decline of a strong soul that should have fought for truth with the same passionate conviction as Ibsen's Hjördis. Vanquished she has to submit anew to the dictates of society whose shallow hypocrisy she loathes. The weaklings of the world are right; we must remain where nature put us, and dispel from our mind all thoughts of lofty ideals. Ibsen with inexorable sadness makes us see step by step the crumbling of ideals. Benavente, on the other hand, except in the case of Nené, makes his heroines show the wisdom of the world by resigning themselves at once to the inevitable fatality.

Isabel, the second wife of Gonzalo, a hardened 'roué', submits without murmuring to the indignities he puts upon her. She will try by her refining influence to tame the wild beast in her husband. In Isabel, Benavente has tried to portray the virtues of the Spanish woman whose influence is to regenerate man. In Gonzalo there is the bitter sketch of the faithless, egotistical Don Juan who ceases his hunting for amorous prey only when he realizes that he is in the sear and yellow leaf.

[1] Comedia produced 13th April 1905.

Isabel bears her trials with true Christian fortitude; so far from feeling jealous at the intrigues carried on by Gonzalo with other women, she feels all the pride of possession. The fact that other women run after him is the best compliment that could be paid to her selection of him as a husband. At first she strikes us as too self-consciously virtuous; her eyes are too often turned upwards in sign of complacent self-satisfaction. But gradually her character evolves to noble indignation in contrast with the puny Gonzalo.

Her passionate speeches against her husband become an apology for feminism in the modern world. Woman has been entirely dedicated to man; she had allowed her personality to sink into his, and even destiny seems to have forbidden her to have an individuality of her own. She loves, suffers, and does not even utter a lament whilst man heedlessly passes her by without ever turning his head. At times he even despises her wonderful submission. Only at the end of his day does he find her, and then, repenting, he exalts her and recognizes in that heart, inured to every suffering, the great treasure of affection. There falls then on the bleak desert of the soul a ray of sunshine that lights up the world and sanctifies life.

Isabel suffers a long time in silence, but at last she speaks out. The effect of this speaking is immediate, for Gonzalo softens and lets himself be led back to virtue by his wife; his spirit is sanctified by her goodness. It is a poignant satire on the position of women in matrimony that Isabel should have had to resign herself to be thus treated by her husband. Their union through all those years has endured only by reason of her self-sacrifice and constancy. But Stuart Mill's question comes to our mind, whether an association is tolerable in which the happiness of one of the associates depends exclusively on the magnanimity of the other. Gonzalo has lived a comfortable domestic

life by the side of Isabel petted and caressed; after tiring of his numerous intrigues, it was always possible for him to return to his patient wife as if nothing had happened. How different Isabel is to Ibsen's Nora.

The Northern master has shown how woman aspires like man to liberty, to an active life, and is not satisfied with a secondary part in the world. Nora is woman without disguise. Her very frivolity, that suggests Hedda Gabbler, is a satire on the position of women in the world. The analysis of her character is not flattering to woman, but behind this portrait we find the terrible question, 'Why is it thus? Whose fault is it if this noble soul does not contain anything but little lies, vanity, and ignorance of real life?' When Nora's eyes are opened to realities, her whole character changes, and instead of resigning herself to her husband she tells him that she is going to take off all disguise. Her first duty is to herself. Like so many feminists she has a one-sided outlook, claiming all and giving nothing.[1] In order to satisfy her impulse towards freedom she is willing to turn her back on her children. The character of Nora is more suited to the mists of the north than the warm sunlit land of Spain, where the Roman Catholic religion has taught steadfastly the doctrine of renunciation. Women suffer many wrongs from their husbands, but protected by the Church, which is the pillar of constituted authority, they remain silent, firmly convinced in their heart that resignation is a virtue. They are silent also through fear of man's violence or through the habit of submission. In a word, they are silent because by tradition they have the soul of a slave. Benavente's play, *Rosas de Otoño*, might be set up as an exact contrary to Ibsen's *Nora*, and whereas the latter play is a tragedy, the former play ends with Isabel's triumph.

[1] Cf. Storm Jameson, *Modern Drama in Europe*, London, 1920, p. 93.

So far from having thoughts of leaving her husband in order to achieve liberty for herself, she carries out the revolution in the home itself and Gonzalo the traditional Don Juan is redeemed. We are reminded of the words Doña Inés addresses to Zorrilla's contrite hero :

> Heme ya aquí,
> don Juan ; mi mano asegura
> esta mano que a la altura
> tendió tu contrito afán
> y Dios perdona a Juan
> al pié de mi Sepultura.

Isabel's last words to her husband sum up the author's moral :

> 'Yes I am very happy. Light and frivolous love which only brings in its train illusion and desire, sees all its petals fall one by one in a brief spring, but the faithful wife whose love endures has as her reward later blossoms, Autumn roses. They are not the flowers of love, they are the flowers of duty watered by the tears of renunciation, breathing forth the essence of the soul that knows not death.'

Benavente symbolizes in this virtuous character the redeeming power of woman, and no play shows more completely her mission of purification. Like all the feminist writers he makes her more beautiful, more noble, more delicate than she is in real life.

It is interesting to compare this play with some of the plays of Martínez Sierra, who is generally regarded as the principal voice for feminist aspirations in Spain. In *Mamá* (1912) he shows the sad life of the heroine Mercedes married to a cold egoist like Gonzalo. Unlike the steadfast Isabel she is frivolous and thus falls under the temptation of one of the Don Juans of Spanish society. By a saving strength of character she saves herself from this scoundrel's attentions, but finds then that her daughter has fallen in love with him. Again her strength appears and she saves her daughter

from the libertine. Mercedes is a Spanish Nora ; she realizes at the end of the play that she and her husband have failed in their duties. ' Wife,' she says, ' that is what I have never been to you. I have been your plaything, your distraction, the pet animal which is caressed and scolded. I have never thought ; perhaps you have left me to think for myself. Man thinks alone, decides alone, and is self-sufficient ; he is the master, the King ;—let woman keep to her frills and frivolities.' Mercedes does not follow Nora's example and go off, leaving her husband and children ; she follows Isabel's example and remains with her husband to tame the wild beast in him. In *Primavera en Otoño* (1911), a play whose title seems to be suggested by *Rosas de Otoño*, Martínez Sierra develops the same subject, the estrangement and gradual reconciliation between husband and wife. In that case the parts are reversed and it is the faithful husband who by his goodness and self-sacrifice brings his wife back to love him. Just as in Benavente's play the primary motive of reconciliation is the daughter María Antonia, so in Martínez Sierra's play Agustina is the unconscious means of bringing her parents together.

In all these Spanish plays the last scene is the same—a scene recalling Ibsen, where husband and wife sit facing one another and discussing the failure of their married life together. But in Benavente and Martínez Sierra there is a sane, healthy moral drawn that is characteristic of the homely good sense of the Spanish people, and both authors agree in extolling the virtues of the Spanish wife and mother. Benavente, like his younger contemporary, continually expresses the belief that Spanish women are happy only in the home as wives and mothers, and in this belief he consciously follows the traditional idea of Spain so beautifully developed in the plays of Galdós, such as *La Loca de la Casa* and *Electra*. In the former play Victoria's

remark to her husband Cruz might be applied by Isabel to Gonzalo—'You are evil, but if evil did not exist, we the good ones should not know what to do, nor should we be able to live.'

In English drama, Sir Arthur Pinero's play, *Mid Channel*, which was produced in 1909, deals with the same subject as *Rosas de Otoño*. It is the tragedy of the wealthy, childless, middle-class household, without intellectual interests, without even social ambitions, without any of what may be called the shock-absorbers of life.

The plot deals with the story of a husband and wife who, though married for fourteen years, still have some affection for one another. Nevertheless they have become accustomed to quarrelling bitterly over the details of their otiose, luxurious everyday existence, and in the end they drive one another so distracted that the wife commits suicide. Mr. Archer says that 'the play though not in the least brutal or, in a bad sense, naturalistic, is as unflinchingly cruel as a design by Hogarth'.[1] No better examples could be taken than *Mid Channel* and *Rosas de Otoño* to expose the differences of realism in drama as it is understood in England and in Spain. Pinero has made his play into a valuable document wherein the social historian may study a typical matrimonial case of the law courts. Zoe Blundell, poor downcast creature, is the victim of the steel rigidity of society in England. We feel moved to tears through sympathy for her, but we see all the time behind Zoe the social abuses which the author wished to attack. The realism of the play is chill and causes us to shudder. Benavente's play is a contrast by reason of its sunny optimism. English or French realism cannot have much influence in Spain because the Spanish character is by nature romantic and

[1] Cf. W. Archer, *The Old Drama and the New*, London, 1923, pp. 320.

idealistic. Martínez Sierra in *La Vida Inquieta* describes thus the warm poetic nature of Spanish realism :

'The Spanish are', he says, 'fortunately a romantic people, romantic in the healthy sense of the term ; they even have still the remains of certain virtues and certain faults which have a freshness and a fragrance about them ; in these days, if the realistic Spanish novel is to be an image of the truth, it must have its poetical character. And it is easy to convince ourselves of this if we compare the realism of our land with the realistic literature of other countries, even those nearest to us, for instance France. The French novels and plays which are being translated nowadays give us the feeling of being a poisoned, dried up fruit—tasty undoubtedly, even healthy, but lacking fresh juice and fragrance. We are a romantic people and there is a freshness about our sensuality, an ingenuous charm about our immorality. Sin has not troubled itself with the complications of science or psychology. Virtue is forgotten here as all over the world, but in the folk songs of the people there are still some words which exalt it. Though we may have lost our heart, yet we can still feel in it the pain of the dagger thrust and we still call "bad actions", things which the rest of the world has raised to the dignity of "customs".' [1]

Benavente, when writing his play, like all the rest of the modern Spanish dramatists, was very little preoccupied with thoughts of writing a social drama like Brieux or Pinero. In his mind Isabel became a creature 'de carne y hueso', and in her he saw the noble Castilian woman. In the early part of the play there are signs that the author had a thesis in his mind, but the character of the heroine soon becomes the dominant note of the play. In the earlier scenes, before the tragedy of Isabel's life dawns on us, there is pure comedy. Gonzalo's donjuanesque antics amuse, and the mannerisms of the French prig, Adolfo, draw laughter, but as Isabel emerges from a type into an

[1] Cf. G. Martínez Sierra, *La Vida Inquieta*, Madrid, 1913, pp. 96–7.

individuality, and as our emotions and feelings are roused for her, the comic spirit fades away. The play ends as a sentimental comedy if we can believe that Gonzalo really will be redeemed by Isabel's goodness; if we are sceptical, we must admit that the play is a tragedy. How different is the irreparable end of Sir Arthur Pinero's play; for once the tables are turned and it is the dramatist from romantic Spain who produces the more modern and less romantic close.

In *El Hombrecito* and *Rosas de Otoño* Benavente laid his scene amongst upper middle-class people, where life flows along peacefully amid the pleasures that material riches can give. The characters in these plays live in shady nooks far from the strain and stress of modern life; they are the sons and daughters of fathers who have slaved in years gone by, but who have been able to leave their children a rich patrimony. And so they spend their days in the monotonous round of worldly pleasures trying to relieve their boredom. They need not work, for their parents have left them enough to ensure them prosperity, and so the material crises of life do not deeply disturb their tranquillity and they have full leisure for their love intrigues, their petty passions and vanities. Benavente having, like Géraldy, excelled in his portrait of the upper, now turned his thoughts to the lower ranks of the bourgeoisie where exterior respectability hardly conceals wolfish hunger. In one of his critical works he refers to the habit in Spanish comic plays of exciting laughter by hunger and poverty and admits that he satirized the upper classes because they enjoyed the advantages of life.

'If at times I have thrashed our aristocracy, it was not owing to prejudice against it, but because being called on to satirise, and taking into account the natural and roguish wish of the public to laugh at somebody's cost, it seemed to me

more charitable to stir up laughter at the expense of those who enjoy many advantages in life than at the expense of those humble souls who toil and suffer. It has never seemed to me that hunger is a fit subject for laughter, and we know that in half our comic plays hunger is the chief cause of merriment.'

In spite of this, Benavente, in *Por Las Nubes*[1] and *La Losa de Los Sueños*,[2] shows up all the pitiable little vanities and vices of the lower middle class with a power of dissection that would seem to be cruel were it not immediately softened by that suave irony which acts as a balm. To his characters the author is like a stern, kind father, who is at first harsh to his children's follies, but relents when he sees the little ones crying. In *Por Las Nubes* he follows in the track of Enrique Gaspar, who in his comedy *La Levita*, written in 1868, had shown all the pathos of a family plunged in poverty but acting still the farce of society. The frock coat which the father of the family wears going to his work symbolizes the wretched position of the actors in that farce. 'Our position', says his wife, 'is certainly very far from being what it should: but we conceal our poverty, for we have a maid-servant and a nice house, considering that we had to take it furnished. We must preserve the strictest economy in our private life so as not to fall in the esteem of the world which only judges by what it sees and considers poverty the most deadly vice of all.' Gaspar does not solve the problems of the poor middle class in his play; Benavente, on the other hand, ends his play with a paean of hope. The salvation for the young man of the middle class who has courage lies in emigration to South America. Instead of staying in Spain, where money is spent trying to keep up a position which has been imposed by a false idea of social duty, let youth go away and work in a land where hope goads to ambition. The same idea

[1] Comedia produced 20th Jan. 1909.
[2] Comedia produced 9th Nov. 1911.

Benavente had developed in *La Comida de Las Fieras*: 'In America man signifies something, he is a force, a guarantee; he struggles, yes, but with primitive pride; when he falls, it is possible to raise himself up again; but in this ancient society, position is all, man is nothing; once conquered, it is useless to return to the struggle.'

In this play as in most of the characteristic works of his second period we hear two harmonies, two ideas going on at the same time. On the one hand, Julio, the hero, wants to marry Emilia and go off to seek his fortune in America; on the other hand, he sees that by his departure he will leave his mother and his sister exposed to still greater poverty in Madrid. He is quite right to go away and start a new life of health and happiness, but his mother is quite right in considering that his departure would mean terrible risks for him and dire distress for herself and her daughter. We have noted many times before how the author develops his drama out of the conflict arising from two kinds of love, two ways of looking at life. It is all in accordance with his questioning mind that recedes at one moment to conservative and at another advances to liberal notions. He weighs carefully the evidence for both sides and only gives his decision, his casting vote, after mature deliberation. At times this meditative method that never works by impulse causes us to be repelled by the lack of passion in his characters. We wish that they would show some of that divine folly of Don Quixote which seems to have descended in little doses to Martínez Sierra in plays such as *Los Dos Pastores* or *Madame Pepita*. But let us always remember that Benavente, the restless traveller in quest of new lands of thought, has always held that emotion must be tranquillized by the intelligence.

For brilliance of dialogue and crispness of construction it would be hard to find anything more satisfying

than the first act of *Por Las Nubes*. By innumerable little touches the author tells us every detail of the life of Doña Carmen, her daughter Luisa, and son Julio.

The picture drawn here of the cheerless life of those suburban Madrid folk with their limited horizon makes a universal appeal, for it is true of Paris and London and any other big city of the modern world. The characters all seem to be stunted in their growth and to need the freshness of an open-air life. Living always in narrow, mean flats, where fresh air finds difficulty in entering, they have a timid outlook on life.

Don Hilario, a doctor with modern views, is eager to tear asunder the veil of hypocrisy that covers the life of the middle classes. All the inmates of those mean, gloomy houses should be made go away into the country and, if only for once, draw in great breaths of fresh air.

That is the problem of all those innumerable individuals living in our big cities, who hardly ever feel the joy of rushing through woods and glades and throwing themselves down in joy on the fresh grass. Modern civilization, with its grinding strain, its blackened atmosphere and shrieking dissonance, has shattered our nerves. Even in the days of Rome a wise ruler like Augustus made the prince of his poets write poems to the glory of country life, in the hope that the huddled crowds in Rome might migrate to the golden fields. Nowadays, when cities are stifled for want of air by their swarming millions, there is need of many georgics, and Benavente's play not only preaches the glory of the open-air life, but also of the breezy ambitions that lead a man far from quill-driving at the behests of 'Messieurs les ronds de cuir'. The illness of Julio's sister comes only from poverty, poverty of blood, poverty of life, poverty of everything. Don Hilario

would use the words that Andrew Undershaft uses to his daughter in Shaw's play, *Major Barbara* :

'What do we do here when we spend years of work and thought and thousands of pounds of solid cash on a new gun or an aerial battleship, that turns out just a hair's-breadth wrong after all? Scrap it. Scrap it without wasting another hour or another pound on it. Well, you have made for yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It doesn't fit the facts. Well scrap it. Scrap it and get one that does fit. That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam-engines and dynamos ; but it won't scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions. What 's the result? In machinery it does very well ; but in morals and religion and politics it is working at a loss that brings it nearer bankruptcy every year.'

Don Hilario, the enlightened man of science, feels that all these ridiculous ideas of middle-class conventionalities should be scrapped, but he talks to deaf ears ; only Julio becomes a convert to his modern opinions. Julio is engaged to Emilia, and filled with an optimistic hope in the future, startles his mother by the declaration of his intended marriage and departure to America. His example, however, is followed by some of his friends, and at the end of the play we get the impression that hope looms ahead for these courageous young men. But Julio does not achieve his freedom without the bitterness of sacrifice. It is only by tearing up inexorably all his roots that he can leave his mother, his fiancée, his sister, his home. Even after he has braced himself up to the thought of leaving his mother and sister, he has to suffer the bitterest disillusionment in his love and faith in Emilia his intended wife. She, too, has to face the bitter struggle between her love for Julio and her love for her mother and home. She hears with dismay his firm intention of emigrating and feels that she has not the courage for such a sacrifice. And so, weeping bitterly, she allows him to go without

her. With Emilia, Julio has to fight alone; in his struggle with his mother he has Don Hilario to help him. When Doña Carmen accuses her son of selfishness in abandoning his mother and sister to their fate, Don Hilario answers her that sons are not only sons but also men for humanity. 'It is', he says, 'an unjust egoism to claim that youth should lag with old age. Let him go. Do not discourage his energy. Be a mother as Spain of old was a mother; she was prodigal of her sons and gave life and soul to those nations, the daughters of her race, who are to-day her greatest if not her only pride. Let him go bearing with him his mother's love and blessing. There is something more sacred than a tomb—the cradle; there is something greater than the past—the future.'

Benavente is here preaching the moral that he had made the basis of an earlier play, *La Noche del Sábado*. To him all in life is flux and reflux, the state of motion and change, the condition of becoming not of being. The fundamental idea is human individuality; Julio must achieve independence for himself and character. Like Imperia, the noble heroine of the other play, he must subdue reality, pushing aside the phantoms which confuse and hem him round, and follow the only reality, the flight of his spirit towards its ideal.

'Toute la vie est dans l'essor,' said Verhaeren, and Benavente in this play again sings the paean of youthful effort. But he is also expressing another doctrine in this play which he had formulated in *Rosas de Otoño* in the character of Isabel. In spite of all the miseries of her married life with Gonzalo she finds the complete realization of her own character in him, in the feeling that he needs her love. So also in this latter play, Doña Carmen and Luisa will find that the truth of their own love for Julio exists in his heart. In wanting Julio to stay with them in the stifling atmosphere at Madrid,

they were not sincere with themselves. They were cowards and refused to listen to the inner promptings of the soul, as does a mother who in time of war refuses to let her son go to fight for his country, and yet secretly blushes for shame if he does not insist on going of his own free will.

In this play Benavente has made an exception to his rule of creating his heroines stronger than his men characters. In most of the plays it is woman who plays heroically and man who trifles on puny pipes; here, however, it is Emilia who admits herself defeated and lacking in courage. Like Nené in *El Hombrecito*, when it comes to the decisive moment, she realizes that she is in reality not capable of so big a sacrifice.

Benavente spares no touch to bring out the mean egoism which animates the majority of these characters. But it is not the lash of satire which he uses in these plays of middle-class life, for he is ready at all times to pity his characters. Laughter is never far from tears in these plays. Like all modern dramatists he refuses to start with any bias towards either the comic or the pathetic. As Mr. Archer says, 'the modern dramatist does not invoke either Thalia or Melpomene, but a tenth Muse Aletheia. He reproduces, or tries to reproduce, the mingled yarn of the web of life, in which pathos and humour inextricably intertwine.'[1]

In *Por Las Nubes* the dominant note at the end of the play is one of optimism and faith in the future. These young men are determined to shake off their old life and start afresh in a new country. In *La Losa de Los Sueños*, on the other hand, there is no relieving note, and the play drags its length to a gloomy ending. In the interval between 1909 and 1911 Benavente had remained silent, and had spent most of his time writing

[1] Cf. W. Archer, *The Old Drama and the New*, pp. 226.

articles for the newspapers and literary reviews. In one of those articles included in the fourth volume of the collection *De Sobremesa*, the author makes a defence against the critics who attacked the work. The most general criticism was that it was a play of unrelieved pessimism, and Benavente says he cannot understand the reason for this criticism. 'The *dénouement* of the play', he says, 'does not show that purely exterior happiness which generally is the most appreciated. But it shows spiritual fortitude and the triumph over our instincts which make us forget, for a momentary satisfaction, our responsibilities and the consequences of our sin.' We find thus that Benavente is consciously evolving in his works towards a realization of an ideal in accordance with the most lofty tenets of Christianity. The heroine Rosina has been seduced by a worthless rake Enrique, and as a result of their love a child is born. The heartless Don Juan, after ruining the girl who passionately loved him, abandons her and the child to their fate. Poor Rosina has to remain with her family, bearing patiently the bitter scorn of her sisters, who lose no chance of telling her that on her account they are discredited in the eyes of the world and will not be able to find husbands. The only persons who have a good word to say to the poor girl are her mother, the rather voluble and vulgar Doña Rosa, and a poor young writer, Cipriano, who tries by his friendship to offer consolation.

To Cipriano she relates all her sufferings here at home at the hands of her family, and for a while we have a hope that this sad-eyed poet will strike out boldly for the future like Julio in *Por Las Nubes*, and give his name to Rosina. But Cipriano is one of life's vanquished, weighed down by circumstances.

'With all my love,' he says, 'what can I offer you? My name, my house where live my mother and my sisters who need my protection and whom I can never leave. There to share

with us poverty, sad poverty, the only sadness that does not diminish when shared with others, because it becomes more heartrending when shared. It is the cruelty of life which separates us, which must separate us if we are to save the best part of our heart. "Life becomes the tombstone for our dreams." If it is sad to bury the dreams of our intellect, the dreams of art and glory that are, perhaps, inaccessible to us, what will it be to bury these dreams of love and kindness?'

It is curious to note that in this play Benavente upholds just the opposite thesis to *Por Las Nubes*, and Cipriano negatives the character of Julio. With Julio there was the same contest between his ambition, his duty to himself, and the duty he owed his mother and sister. With splendid optimism he made a courageous bid for freedom, though the sacrifice meant cutting deep into his own flesh. Cipriano with his dreamy character is one of the world's weaklings for whom Benavente, like Galsworthy, has great sympathy. Cipriano was always dreaming of writing a great work, and before he sat down to write his mind quickened with ideas. 'But on writing my emotion down it was only a tear that fell on the paper. A tear on paper is not a beautiful phrase to move anybody.' Starting off with this weakness of character, it is natural to suppose that he would be unable to release his personality from its prison. Thus we might qualify Benavente's symbolic phrase, 'Life becomes the tombstone for our dreams', and say that such a phrase is only a motto for weak heroes such as Cipriano, but is utterly untrue for a Julio, a Manolo, or a Victoria.

The end of the play would have been more striking if Benavente had not made Cipriano offer excuses for not marrying Rosina. The result was to be that Rosina should resign herself to living alone, devoted entirely to her child, the fruit of her sin. Yet the author confuses the issues by making the hero give economic reasons for not marrying the heroine, and very shallow economic reasons at that, such as could

only be uttered by a hide-bound bachelor who was in mortal fear of disturbing his fixed habits by marrying without money.

From a dramatic point of view this play is by far the poorest of the five: the action moves slowly and becomes very monotonous. At many points the scenes resolve themselves into long sections of rhetoric spoken by one character after another. Throughout the play the author seems eager not so much to express life as to expose on the stage a ready-made critical philosophy of life. The first act is full of subtle, realistic touches, but there is too much padding before we arrive at the real initiation of the action.

III. Dialect Plays

In spite of the success of many of Benavente's plays, there has always been a section of the Spanish critics which violently criticized every new work from his pen. In his satirical plays he was rebuked for having brought Spanish drama under the domination of the *théâtre des boulevards*; then, as his work began to show leanings towards philosophy, he was accused of trying to make a philosophy of life rather than drama. Many were the charges levelled against him on the score of being didactic. 'Drama', it was said, 'must not follow Moratín or Tamayo and correct or teach. It should follow Larra who was true to Spanish tradition when he stated the function of drama thus: "The moral of a play must not be put by the author into the mouth of this or that character; it must appear clearly from the action, and the spectator must deduce it absolutely and naturally from the 'dénouement' itself."'[1] Benavente, owing to his French education,

[1] Cf. Larra, *La Niña en Casa y la Madre en la Máscara.* Quoted by J. Cejador y Frauca in study on Benavente.

always proceeded in the opposite way. Having first of all shown clearly the satirical intention or the intellectual theme of his play, he then tried to enclose it in action which, as a consequence, lacked those plastic qualities that are essential to true drama. The perpetual grievance of many people was that he never brought living beings on the stage, but only puppets. We shall see how he countered this criticism by definitely bringing on the stage the puppets of the *commedia dell' arte* and making them seem at times human. It is easy to understand why this criticism of Benavente should arise in Spain which of all countries has admired in literature and art the presentation of the 'man of flesh and bones'. How the Spanish always excelled in this we can see if we consider pictures such as *Los Borrachos* of Velázquez, the Charles III of Goya, 'El Campesino' of Zuloaga, literary characters such as Sancho Panza and Pedro Crespo.

Benavente is the very antithesis to the spirit which produced such art: instead of the massiveness of marble we find in him the daintiness of porcelain, instead of passionate exaltation, the cold smile of the cynic. Instead of fashioning a mighty statue he has rather followed the boudoir-sculptors of modern times, chiselling out numerous figurines that delight by their miniature graces. But Benavente, after animating by his subtle spirit numerous types of dramatic performance, determined to go back to the Spanish folk of old Castile and to write plays true to the traditional realism of his country. In the two plays, *Señora Ama*[1] and *La Malquerida*,[2] he produced work in direct reaction to all that so far he had written. Instead of the refined cynicism that we meet with in town-bred society, we must wander through the

[1] Comedia produced 22nd Feb. 1908.
[2] Drama produced 12th Dec. 1913.

parched plains of Castile and enter into the lives of its folk, listen to their dialect, observe their customs and their relation to one another. In the former play an attempt is to be made to interpret the mind of the Castilian woman through the traditional Comedia, in the latter there is to be a presentation of the tragedy of blood and passion.

In *Señora Ama* Benavente tries to do for Castile what Guimerá did for Catalonia—he might have taken as motto that phrase of Maragall: 'El alma de un pueblo es el alma universal que brota al través de un suelo.'

Señora Ama, with its rustic characters, symbolizes the Castilian folk, and from their conflicts and reactions on the stage we are to infer the natural surroundings in that desolate, parched upland of Castile that cannot see the sea. All is silent; the empty distances are broken here and there by ghostly cypress trees. In these uplands, where nature is harsh, men's countenances and characters are austere. 'Cantos y Santos,' 'stones and saints,' was a proverb of Saint Teresa's town Avila, and no saying could better sum up the rigid austerity of the Castilian with his tendency to mysticism. In this art of description Benavente in this play recalls Guimerá, but the methods employed are different. Whereas the latter, in *Terra Baixa* and *María Rosa*, lays stress on his descriptions in the play, the former makes his characters suggest indirectly their surroundings. In contrast to so many modern dramatists who devote pages and pages to stage directions in order to create an atmosphere, Benavente gives the minimum of directions and lets his characters themselves create the framework for their action. We are told that the action takes place in a Castilian village, in a farmhouse. In accordance with the author's theories, the external plot is very simple and attention is concentrated on the subtle inferences to be drawn. As

Mr. J. G. Underhill says: 'The tendency of Benavente's art is away from the plastic towards the unsubstantial, the transparent.'[1]

Dominica, the 'Señora Ama' or owner of some land, has the misfortune, like Isabel in *Rosas de Otoño*, to be married to a fickle husband, who sails blithely from conquest to conquest. Like Isabel she is possessed of a calm patience and endures his vagaries, nay even feels a slight sensation of pride at his successes. 'He enjoys himself with all women and deceives them, but I am his wife, the only one and am above all the rest.' Like Gonzalo, Feliciano is the true Spanish Don Juan, a 'gallo alborotaor' as his father-in-law calls him, but whereas the former is already in the sear and yellow leaf, and reaching the stage when there is naught left but reminiscence, the latter is in his hey-day. On all sides in this little hamlet in the uplands are to be found the victims of his passions. The play, however, does not centre in him but in Dominica. Forgiving as she is to her guilty husband, even to the extent of pardoning him after she has discovered him in another woman's arms, her whole character changes as soon as she learns that she is to have a child. Like Claudia Montefranco in Bracco's celebrated play *Maternità*, she blazes up against her husband's brutal egoism and by her strong will leads him back to a virtuous life. The basis of the play lies in the evolution of the character of the heroine and in her influence on others. All this simple plot is developed by brilliant dialogue in the author's very best manner. There is no trace of the prolixity and tendency to rhetoric that we noticed in his other plays; the language is the picturesque dialect of the country folk round Toledo. All the characters move in their own natural surroundings, and the author has managed to convey an exact impression of rural life.

[1] Underhill, *Benavente*, vol. ii, Introd.

Benavente, as is his custom, has paid great attention in the play to the secondary personages, and as a result there are some excellent character parts. 'Quien ve un pueblo ve un reino: y quien ve un reino ve el mundo entero,' runs the proverb, and certainly the author has managed to crowd on to the stage a great variety of human types. There is Tio Aniceto, the characteristic old Castilian farmer, dignified in speech and deportment, wizened in countenance and shrewd at heart. María Juana, who resembles María Antonia in *Rosas de Otoño*, is possessed of a passionate nature. She is unhappy with her husband, for she is in love with Feliciano and it is mainly through her confession to Dominica that we learn of Feliciano's irresistible charm. Then there are Dacia, the young shy maiden, and Gubesinda, the inimitable farm servant who has been with the Señora Ama a long time. One of Benavente's happiest thoughts in the play was the introduction of the drunken Beba, a picturesque rogue. He is one of those vagabond characters who have always existed in Spain and were introduced into literature by the picaresque novels. The Spanish rogue has a jaunty insolence that is not met with in those of other countries. Beba is not only possessed of a garrulous tongue; he also sings and plays the guitar, and as Gubesinda says to him: 'a la puerta ande hay ramo es la musica más larga.' His drunken antics produce a comic effect and he crowns the play with a song.

The scene of *La Malquerida* is laid among prosperous farmers in Castile. Raimunda, the heroine, is married to Esteban. She has a daughter, Acacia, by a former marriage. In the opening scene, visitors have called at the house to congratulate Raimunda on the betrothal of Acacia to a youth of the district, Faustino, son of a farmer, Eusebio. She had been engaged to her cousin Norberto, but for some unaccountable reason the marriage had been broken off. Acacia from the

first is a queer character: ever since her mother's marriage to Esteban she has shown a reserve towards her step-father in spite of his kindness and affection. By subtle touches that give an impression of gloomy sadness, Benavente prepares the minds of the audience for exposition of the action. Acacia's character assumes still greater mystery in the next scene, where she shows her girl friend Milagros the presents given to her all these years by Esteban.

By means of cleverly written dialogue we are shown that a peculiar sexual hatred exists between Acacia and Esteban. Or else Acacia is an unbalanced neurotic. She tears in pieces furiously a letter he had written to her. During the scene the stage had been growing darker; the night is gloomy and starless and the silence oppressive. Suddenly a shot is heard in the distance. News comes quickly afterwards that Acacia's fiancé, Faustino, has just been shot dead, and many say that Norberto in a fit of jealous rage against his more successful rival has done the deed. All are in confusion and wish to rush out to see the body. It is Esteban who finally imposes calm and insists on nobody leaving the house that night.

In Act II the mystery still continues. The family of Esteban have moved out to their house in the wood in order that they may escape from the gossiping commiseration of the village folk. Esteban relates how the whole village is in a fever of excitement to try and find the culprit. A blood-feud has been declared by Eusebio, the father of Faustino, and his family against Norberto, whom they suspect of the deed, as he had been betrothed to Acacia. The villagers are divided into two bands; one declares that Eusebio is right in imputing the guilt to Norberto; the other declares that Norberto is not the culprit, as the police court has declared him innocent. All these rumours travel swiftly from the village to the house in the wood:

Esteban every day looks more worried. Raimunda, passionately desirous of searching for the truth, questions everybody and endeavours to piece together evidence. Her husband she eagerly cross-examines on every occasion. This desire of Raimunda to know the truth communicates itself to the audience and becomes an obsession. If it was not Norberto that did the deed, who can it have been? The stage is plunged in the gloom of uncertainty and mystery. Faustino's brothers and even old Eusebio himself are convinced that Norberto is the culprit, in spite of the Law Courts, and so they determine to carry out their own vendetta. They ambush him as he is going to see Raimunda and he is carried into her house wounded. Eagerly seeking a solution to all this mystery, Raimunda manages to draw an account from the unwilling lips of Norberto. He tells her that the village is alive with rumours concerning Acacia, Esteban, and herself and that the villagers are singing a song which refers to them. The song is as follows:

Él que quiere a la del Soto
tié pena de la Vida.
Por quererla quien quiere
le dicen la Malquerida.[1]

Esteban, he says, had long been in love with Acacia

[1] 'He who loves the maid from the wood,
loves to his rue bitter and long.
Because by his love-curse betrayed
they call her e'en the Maid of shame.'

This song on which Benavente founds his play recalls the 'copla' on which José Feliú y Codina built his celebrated drama *Dolores*, 1891. Professor Cejador y Frauca argues that it is not a Castilian folk song. 'Malquerer' means 'to hate', the opposite to 'bienquerer', but Acacia is beloved by Esteban. The people would never have called her thus. He says also that popular 'coplas' are never cut in two sections with two different ideas as is the case here, but they develop one idea alone. The line—'tié pena de la Vida'—is not correct, for the people would have sung 'tiene', not 'tié'. (Cf. J. Cejador y Frauca, *J. Benavente*, op. cit.)

and saw with dismay the prospect of her marriage and departure from the house. For this reason he had threatened him with death if he did not desist from seeking the girl's hand. Afterwards when she became engaged to Faustino, mad with jealousy, he had prevailed by money on his disreputable minion 'El Rubio' to murder the young man. The suspicions of the village people have been increased still more by the attitude of 'El Rubio' since the occurrence. He has been spending money profusely in drink, and in one of his fits of intoxication has made suspicious statements.

The scales now have fallen from Raimunda's eyes and she sees the terrible reality. We have arrived at a point in the drama that is so dear to Pirandello in the *Teatro dello Specchio*. Like Pirandello, Benavente tries to describe dramatically the deep transformation that takes place in the mind of a person when the situation, in which she has lived for years sublimely unconscious, suddenly reveals itself in all its terrible reality. Raimunda sees in the magic mirror her life as it really is, and henceforth nothing can ever be the same as it was. The next scene is a violent altercation between Raimunda and Acacia: the latter shows her hatred for Esteban by relating to her mother how he used to follow her about. At the end Esteban appears and the act closes with Raimunda's passionate outburst against her husband.

After the fierce scene between mother and daughter the entry of Esteban comes as an anticlimax, for the scene of recrimination between husband and wife that the spectator was looking forward to is deferred. A romantic dramatist would have shortened the scene between Raimunda and Acacia and would have ended the act with a long passionate rhetorical scene with Esteban. But Benavente, following plays like *Rosmerholm*, *Ghosts*, and *Little Eyolf*, was more interested in

showing the complexes of Acacia's character that is a mystery to herself. Up to this point the play has advanced with wonderful rapidity. Like a Greek tragedy the drama arises from the inexorable advance of retribution on the guilty sinner, and the author, in a way that faintly suggests the method employed by Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon*, has managed to envelop the action in deep mystery at first and then allow little by little the evil to appear in all its hideousness. Up to the end of the second act there has existed an electrical sympathy between the stage and the audience, but in the third act this sympathy diminishes. In many of his plays Benavente is unable to sustain the drama up to the end. As José Rogerio Sanchez says, too short a period elapses between the second and the third act for Raimunda's sublime indignation arising from her outraged feelings as mother and wife to change into infinite pity towards Esteban. From the first scene of the third act it is clear that Benavente contemplated changing her character.[1]

Raimunda is a woman of the same temperament as Dominica in *Señora Ama* or Isabel in *Rosas de Otoño*; she has been altogether as those two other heroines were, under the sexual domination of her husband. In each case it needed a rude awakening to cause the scales to fall from these women's eyes and make them see their husbands as they really are. Dominica is so infatuated sexually with her Feliciano that she closes her eyes to his myriad infidelities. Raimunda has lived on blandly unconscious that black tragedy was seated behind her. Now when the crisis has come she is torn by conflicting emotions. She still loves her husband passionately and her sex cries out to him, but she wants him to suffer for his sin. This

[1] Cf. José Rogerio Sanchez, *Critical Study of 'La Malquerida'*, Madrid, 1914.

conflict Benavente develops in his brilliant antithetic manner. He gains in power by postponing the great scene of recrimination between husband and wife. If it had taken place at the end of Act II there would have been no antithesis, as Raimunda was altogether dominated by feelings of horror against Esteban; whereas now in the third act her feelings have softened and pity for him has had time to weaken her resolve. No scene in Benavente's works is a greater example of antithesis. Honourable and religious woman that she is, she wishes Esteban to suffer to the full as an atonement to God for his sin. Such a spirit of justice is characteristic of the Castilian mind inured to codes of honour. But there is the soft, womanly side to Raimunda's character, and seeing him entrapped on all sides like a wild beast she feels compassion. It is difficult to see the proud Castilian type in this whimpering coward who can hardly face the glance of his wife. No play shows more clearly how feministic Benavente was and it is difficult for the men actors to play up to Benaventian heroines. To Esteban, as he approaches her trembling with weariness, all dishevelled and bleeding after his wild flight through the woods, she says :

'Don't weep and hide your face ; ye'll have to hold it high as I do when they come to question us all. Even though the house be afire let no smoke show. Dry those eyes, blood should have dripped from them ! Drink a little water—poison it should have been ! Don't drink so fast for you're all of a sweat ! Look at the state of you, all torn by brambles, knives they should have been. Let me give you a wash : 'twould make a saint afeared to see ye.'

Henceforth she determines to make a bold bid to save the remnants of her wrecked life. With a woman's practical sense she evolves a ready plan ; she will send Acacia away to the Nuns of Encinar who are fond of her and pray for her. Afterwards she shall be sent far away

to her aunt where she may start a new life. 'She may perhaps marry, for there are many fine set-up boys over there and she 's the best match down in the village. Perhaps then she'll return with her children who will call us grandfather and grandmother, and we growin' old.' The obstacle to Raimunda's plan is Acacia herself, who has overheard the conversation between her mother and her step-father.

She accuses her mother of casting her out from the house in order to remain there alone with Esteban, and then breaks out into expression of most violent hatred against him, saying: 'I even wish he would kill me; then perhaps you would cease to love him.' Esteban, who has heard the last words, says that he is going to deliver himself up to justice. It is at this time that the climax of tragedy breaks out and all the hopes that existed before are once more dashed to the ground. The nature of Acacia which had been such a mystery all through the play is now revealed. Raimunda tries to make her throw herself into the arms of Esteban whom she should love as a father; but at that moment Acacia realizes the terrible truth that she is in love with her own step-father. With great skill Benavente has managed to work up his tragedy to a powerful climax.

RAIMUNDA. Can't ye call him father even once?

ESTEBAN. She'll never forgive me.

RAIMUNDA. Yes, daughter, kiss him. Let him hear ye call him father. Sure even the dead will have to forgive us and rejoice with us.

ESTEBAN. Daughter!

ACACIA. Esteban! My God, Esteban!

ESTEBAN. Ah!

RAIMUNDA. But even yet ye don't call him father. Has she lost her senses? Ah! Lip to lip, and you claspin' her tight in your arms! Away, loose her, I see now why ye didn't wish to call him father. 'Tis now I see that you've been the cause of all, my curse on you!

ACACIA. Yes, 'tis true. Kill me! 'tis true, 'tis true! He is the only man I have ever loved.'

At this sudden and irreparable catastrophe Raimunda becomes distracted; she has only one thought—let punishment consume the wicked. She shouts out to the neighbours to come in and seize the assassin and the wicked woman.

El Rubio, Juliana, and others from the village dash in; Raimunda tries to prevent Esteban from rushing out; he raises his gun and shoots her. The play ends with her words of redemption as she dies:

'It has been for my daughter; Acacia, this man cannot do anything to you now—you are saved. Blessed be the blood that saves, the blood of our lord Jesus Christ.'

These words recall the conclusion of *Sacrificios*, where Alma, after hearing of Doll's sacrifice, says to Ricardo: 'Leave me, there must be blood on our hands.' The sacrifice of the innocent Raimunda, though she made it involuntarily, was the one atonement that could appease the gods—it is the sacrifice of the pure victim like that of Iphigeneia. Benavente in a manner that recalls Greek tragedy has heightened the effect of his tragedy by the stress he lays on the inevitability of Fate. True to his moral purpose, he always brings in the doctrine of renunciation to cap his tragedy. In this respect he resembles Wagner, and there are few of his dramas in which woman does not play the part of Elizabeth or Senta. Raimunda only follows the other heroines who discovered their peace in this pessimistic doctrine so characteristic of the nineteenth century. Raimunda's character has been accused by many critics of being untrue to life They say it is very unlikely that Esteban would come back to the house after his wife has driven him out. He comes back and weeps abjectly before her, and though she had been so fierce at the end of Act II, she becomes

in Act III soft and forgiving. Benavente needs her to be reconciled with Esteban in order that he may produce the grand climax at the end by making her ask Acacia to kiss him and call him father. Many find it hard to believe that Raimunda had lived so long without noticing the passion of Esteban for Acacia. Even Juliana, the old servant, has long suspected the truth. After Raimunda at the end of the second act has discovered that Esteban loves Acacia and has committed the murder on that account, it is hard to understand why she does not keep him away from her. A feeling of natural jealousy must have arisen in her mind, yet we find her trying to bring her daughter into dangerous proximity to him. A woman who was passionately fond of her husband and had heard the horrible news which was to ruin her life, would have kept him out of the way at any rate until the trouble was past. There is no doubt that Benavente, after working out brilliantly the first two acts, was in a quandary as regarded the *dénouement*. All the events in that act are so arranged as to lead up willynilly to the theatrical climax which Professor Cejador y Frauca says is very French in style, but which we should rather consider to be like some of the red climaxes in the plays of Echegeray's second period. Raimunda has not the natural spontaneity of Dominica. Both have the same passionate love for their husbands, yet whereas Dominica is a true woman of the country, Raimunda at times goes perilously near to the stage-struck heroine of romantic drama. Her words before she dies recall the moral aphorisms of the early Dumas Fils plays, which were uttered by the dying heroine in order that the members of the audience might go to their homes chastened in spirit. In Esteban we are far from the proud heroes of Spanish chivalry whom Marquina loves to describe. No character could be less characteristic of a son of the soil of Castile; he is

not a man of flesh and bones, but a shadowy, unreal character. Benavente in nearly all his plays has given the noble parts to women and has shown up man as vile and egotistical, but never has he carried his contempt for man to greater lengths than in this play. In the earlier acts Esteban appears but little and never utters any but evasive words. After the murder has been committed he becomes a miserable coward and has not even the spirit to hold his head up and face his minion 'El Rubio'. It is 'El Rubio' who commands the situation and shows more courage than his wretched master. Esteban is tied to him because he had put himself into his power, and Raimunda says to him: 'Ah, you have got to hang your head before that man. What greater punishment could there be, what greater shame than to go through life an' he tied to you?' In the great scene with Raimunda, her virility and courage contrasts with his cowardice. He is the most inglorious anti-hero Benavente ever created.

There is no doubt that Benavente has shown great art in developing the character of Acacia from a dramatic point of view. The scene where she shows to Milagros the presents given by her step-father is striking, and the author has managed to keep up the mystery of her character to the end. Though from the first it is evident that she is a 'Freudian' subject, we are not sure for a long time whether she is not just simply jealous because her mother has married again. It is the usual thing for step-daughters to hate their step-fathers. It is only in the last scene of all when she kisses him that the whole mystery is revealed and we find that her hatred is in reality violent sexual passion. The passion of Acacia might be summed up in the words of Baudelaire: 'The one and supreme pleasure of love lies in the certainty of doing evil, and male and female know from birth that in evil all pleasure is to be found.'

The production of this play raised many points of criticism. Some whose nerves were irritated by the roughness of this tragedy thought of the story only as a monstrous sin; others made many speculations as to whether the case of the love of Esteban for Acacia could be real. With regard to the former point we can turn back to Calderón and find that he wrote plays on much more scabrous topics. In *La Venganza de Tamar* the drama is based on the love of Amón for his sister Tamar.

Ibsen in modern times treated subjects that resemble that of *La Malquerida*. In *Rosmerholm* there is the case of a love relationship between father and daughter, but the author lessens the incestuous *motif* by making the daughter illegitimate. In *Ghosts* there is the description of love between brother and half-sister, also in *Little Eyolf*. In the latter case Ibsen again modifies the theme by showing at the end that Asta is not the sister of Alfred.

When *La Malquerida* was produced, a critic of Barcelona discovered that this work was a 'trasunto fiel' of *Misteri di dolor*, a play by Adria Gual, the Catalan dramatist, the originator of the *Teatro Íntim*. The French writer, Camille Pitollet, in his article on Benavente (*Mercure de France*, 1st Dec. 1922) refers to the accusation of plagiarism against him.

'It was perfectly well known,' he says, 'at least in Catalonia, that *Misteri de Dolor* had been represented eight or ten years before *La Malquerida*; and that Benavente had, at Barcelona, attended one of the performances, and had, in addition, sent Gual a letter of congratulation on his play. Nevertheless not only did he write *La Malquerida*, but caused pressure to be brought to bear on the Society of Spanish authors at Madrid in order that the Castilian translation of Gual's drama might not be played in the capital.'

It is interesting to compare the plot of *Misteri de Dolor* with that of *La Malquerida*. The play is based on the

love existing between a step-father and the daughter of his wife. The wife when she learns of the terrible tragedy commits suicide. Gual wrote the play in 1903–4, two years after Benavente's *Sacrificios* (1901), in which a woman who loves her sister's husband wins his affections, and the sister decides to commit suicide because she is convinced of the initial error of her marriage. Thus the same accusation that is brought against Benavente with regard to *La Malquerida* could have been brought by him against Gual with regard to *Sacrificios*. Though there is at first sight a similarity between the plot of *Misteri de Dolor* and *La Malquerida*, on further examination the similarity diminishes.

The skeleton plot of Gual's play is the same in Benavente; Mariana resembles Raimunda, Marianeta resembles Acacia. Silvestre resembles Esteban, and the action in both plays turns on the same pivot. There is, however, a great difference between the development of Marianeta's character and that of Acacia. Marianeta all through the play was in love with Silvestre, even before her mother married him; thus we can foresee the catastrophe of the play right from the beginning. Acacia was a child when Raimunda married Esteban, and all through the play, right up to the climax in the last act, she is convinced herself that she hates him. The character of Marianeta is natural, the character of Acacia is very complex, because there is the combination of her jealousy of Esteban for having married her mother, as well as suppressed love for him.

The simplicity of Gual's play is profoundly modified by Benavente's florid stage technique. Where Gual has only six characters, Benavente has fifteen, and he also adds episodes such as that of El Rubio, the hired murderer, who indirectly becomes the cause of Esteban's undoing. In Gual's play Mariana is the protagonist and

the whole play centres round her. In *La Malquerida* the Aristotelian critics would find it difficult to discover unity of action. At one moment Raimunda, at another Esteban, at another Acacia become the protagonist. It is not possible to say that any one of the three is the hero or heroine of the tragedy. It would be truer to say that the real protagonist of the play is the people, and the chief moral of it consists in the gradual awakening of public consciousness in this village of the Castilian uplands. We see in each act the increasing advance of public opinion towards punishing the guilty sinner. At first Norberto the innocent one is accused, but gradually public opinion sifts the evidence, and as soon as he is proved innocent, he is led home in triumph by big crowds. Though the village folk do not appear on the stage, and leave the principal actors to play their sorry tragedy before us, we feel that like an invisible chorus they are commenting all the time on the tragic fatality of man.

CHAPTER III

PLAYS OF FANTASY

I. Psychological Studies

In the last chapter we considered Benavente a grim realist of the modern world, for ever gazing at society microscopically. Let us now examine the other side of his personality—the imaginative side, which appeared faintly in the porcelain miniatures of the *Teatro Fantástico*. The works which we shall group under the general title, 'plays of fantasy', are a contrast, because in them Benavente does not try to observe so much as to express: instead of looking at society coldly and critically he strives to show the antithesis between the world of reality and the dream-world of the imagination. With joy he lets his fantasy create idealized heroines or scenes of oriental magnificence to serve as setting to his dramatic idea. To understand this side of his personality we must go back to the first years of the new century.

The Spanish public had by that time begun to recognize Benavente as its greatest contemporary satirist when he suddenly branched off into tragic drama with *Sacrificios*[1] and *Alma Triunfante*.[2] We have accustomed ourselves to Benavente the artist, working his puppets with ironic smile, and it is with difficulty that we can adapt our minds to the subtle evolution in the author's temperament. The basis of his early satirical comedies is that close observation of Spanish customs which he had learnt from Benito Pérez Galdós and from the French Naturalists.

[1] Drama produced 19th July 1901.
[2] Drama produced 2nd Dec. 1902.

But as years went on he came under the influence of the new ideals which were sweeping over European literature. The famous lecture delivered by Ferdinand Brunetière at Besançon in 1896 entitled *La Renaissance de l'Idéalisme* was the consecration of the new spirit. Against the cold, comfortless doctrine of the Positivists there sprang up new hopes. 'Idealism', said Brunetière, 'is at last the conviction, the intimate conviction, the indestructible belief that behind the canvas, behind the stage where the drama of history and of nature is being played, there is hidden an invisible cause, a mysterious author —a Deus absconditus who has settled beforehand the succession of the scenes and their *dénouement*.' Owing to Benavente's profoundly religious Catholic temperament he was bound to react to the idealistic theories formulated by Brunetière. We find thus a definite evolution towards the creation of ideal types in accordance with the traditions of Spanish literature. Both *Sacrificios* and *Alma Triunfante* may be included in the modern drama of ideas, of the type that Maeterlinck and Curel introduced into France, and Enrico Butti and Roberto Bracco into Italy. Benavente continues his ardent propaganda for the feminists: like Galdós, he considered woman capable of greater sacrifices than man, and hence in these two plays we very often forget the existence of the men characters, so enwrapt are we in the evolution of the heroines.

Sacrificios was performed for the first time a few months after *Lo Cursi*, but there is no trace of disdainful social satire: rather do we come under the spell of a refined, delicate pessimism. Alma and Doll, two sisters, have been adopted by a singing-master, Esteban, who aspires to make one of them into a great singer. Alma is a born artist, and under Esteban's strong guidance she becomes famous. He has devoted

all his life to this ideal, and in pursuing it he has not thought of Alma's spiritual upbringing, nor has he paid any attention to Doll, the younger sister. Alma wins world-wide renown in opera; letters, telegrams, cablegrams from every quarter of the world announce her successes, but she is not happy. When the play opens we find her at Esteban's house in the country, where she is resting. Ricardo, who is in love with her, voices her grievances to the world, and he has come, against the will of Esteban, to win her. Esteban looks on Alma as his life's work, and he hates Ricardo with the hatred of a man who sees one stronger coming to seize his treasure. Ricardo shows him his fault. 'You have formed a great artist; but this wonderful work of art has a soul; a woman's soul which you also consider your own creation, and this must not be, worthy maestro.' Alma herself is torn by doubts: she is attracted to Ricardo but she loves her art above all things. She had longed for the quiet retirement of the country, but soon she begins to long again for the excitements of the artist's life. She fears that in loving Ricardo she will not be able to stifle her love for art and settle down to married life. 'Our heart', she says, 'buries well its dead but ill conceals its living.' She then bethinks her of her young sister, Doll, who has just returned from school, and who looks on her as a mother: she determines to make Ricardo marry Doll. Doll is the pale, fragile young heroine of Maeterlinck—a Princess Maleine who is crushed in life by a relentless Fatality. She is the direct contrast to the passionate Alma, whose masterful mind dominates the whole drama. Doll hearkens to Alma in everything, and even agrees to marry Ricardo when her sister tells her. 'Alma created our affection,' she tells him later: 'we are her work of art. I know that if she had not said to me, "love him", I should never have loved you.'

She is one of those women whose whole life is resignation. Ricardo tells her not to accept her life with resigned submissiveness—'Ill will you be able to defend your happiness if you believe that it is not yours and that you must always sacrifice it'—a sentence full of tragic irony that foreshadows the end of the tragedy. Alma's character has, however, changed since Act I. She has made the sacrifice of her love for Ricardo thinking that it was for the best, especially as it was for her beloved sister, Doll, but she had counted without the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on: she is subconsciously jealous of Doll, and one of Benavente's most subtle touches is in the way he takes the bloom off her conscience. She has returned to her wandering career as an artist, but she is disillusioned owing to her longing for Ricardo's love, and eventually she returns to her sister. We understand the state of mind she is in when we hear her brutal words to her old master, Esteban: 'Why did you make me an artist? Why did you deform my spirit, just as the brutal circus-trainer dislocates the fair limbs of a child? What did I know of life? With what right did you condemn me to a life without freedom in order that I might become what you wished? You see my sister: I might have lived like her, and been happy like her, as stupidly happy, which is the only way of being happy.' She realizes that her sacrifice has been false: she has lied to her heart.

'Oh! the lies of our heart! the great sacrifices we make. We deceive ourselves by pretending not to love, whereas in reality we love with all the energy of our will. Did you believe that I loved my art above all things and that for glory I left you without sadness?' But Ricardo is of baser moral fibre than Alma: he agreed to her bargain because he thought that by such means he would not lose her altogether.

He voices the thought that Alma never dared to confess to herself—'I cannot be happy without you . . . my happiness lay in waiting for you, for I knew you would have to return.' They had both played a cruel game with their own hearts, but the result was to bring tragedy on the innocent. After the passionate scene between the two lovers which terminates Act II, the scene between Doll and Esteban comes as a relief. Doll, the sylphlike child, is already a woman of sharp intuitions. Her life has always been to accept what was offered her; but now she begins to think for herself, and the thought begins to dawn on her that she is an obstacle to the happiness of all. Though her questions alarm Alma, the latter cannot bring herself to go away. She meets Ricardo, who out of his intense egoism urges her to yield to him: 'Doll can never be happy,' he says, 'and we can be.' 'Alas, no, we shall never be,' answers Alma. 'Happiness only passes once through our life; it is useless to say to it: "wait, wait; I shall return to you presently; now I hasten to win riches or glory." Happiness does not wait for us; when we return expecting to find it, we only find its spectre, the spectre of the happiness we have killed. Yes, we have killed our happiness.' But Doll has seen the two lovers. She rushes past them saying that she is going to save the life of a poor bird which is being maltreated by some children. A few minutes afterwards cries are heard, and the news is brought that Doll has been drowned. Has she fallen in accidentally or has she committed suicide? The agonizing doubt will sit eternally heavy on the two guilty lovers' hearts. 'We shall never know,' says Alma; 'she was a good soul and the good souls sacrifice themselves in silence.' Doll has sacrificed herself, true always to her ideas of resignation; she saw that Alma and Ricardo really loved one another, and that she was the obstacle

in the path to their happiness, and so she gave her life that by one noble sacrifice she might wipe out their ignoble sacrifice. But has she succeeded? The effect of her death has been to drive apart Ricardo and Alma for ever. Alma ends the play, saying to Ricardo who wants to go away with her: 'No, leave me; there must be blood on our hands.' These words recall the situation at the end of Musset's beautiful play, *On Ne Badine Pas Avec L'Amour*. Perdican there uses nearly the same words as Alma: 'je ne sais ce que j'éprouve: il me semble que mes mains sont couvertes de sang.' In both cases the death of the innocent victim keeps the lovers apart for ever. Alma is a noble heroine whose virile masterfulness dominates all in the play. It is she who protects Doll as if she were a hothouse plant; it is she whose mind works on the puny hero Ricardo. But Alma had forgotten that she was but a puppet moved by threads. Her character evolves in the second act towards that of a jealous woman. She realizes that she has deceived herself, and by this self-deception she has dashed to the ground the one reason for her existence, the love of her sister. Doll is in every respect a contrast to Alma: she is one of those frail sylphlike heroines who appeared on the horizon with the pre-Raphaelite movement. Like Maeterlinck's early characters she is the 'plaything of destiny', and has only thought of life under the guidance of her elder sister: 'my life has been to accept always what has been offered to me.' She has the same delicate beauty of character as Laura de Ruydiaz in *Alma y Vida* by Galdós—a character whose symbol might be expressed in flowers. But though she has accepted her sister's will in everything, yet with swift intuition she perceives the coming tragedy. In the last act her words to Alma are all full of tragic irony, for she understands the sacrifice her sister has made of her love:

and so, when the certainty of her suspicions appears, she determines to sacrifice herself for all. One of Benavente's most masterly strokes in the play is the scene of catastrophe where he uses the symbol of the children ill treating the bird. 'And we', says Alma, 'are like cruel children tormenting in their play a heart.' Benavente has written a tragedy without a hero, for neither Ricardo nor Esteban impress their personality upon us. Ricardo is a singularly misty personage and only seems to exist as a foil to Alma. By this work Benavente proved how well adapted the Spanish stage was to the subtle, psychological tragedy of the modern world. The prose is so beautiful that we must apply to it the epithet winged. To applaud *Sacrificios* meant an apostasy for the Spanish public; it meant that the era of red romantic drama, with its glorification of force and its conventional and exaggerated painting of passions, was past. It had mattered not to the old authors whether the methods used in order to reach the emotions of the public were good or bad. But with the psychological drama of Benavente we find an attempt made to force the drama into the narrow path leading to artistic truth. 'Reality is', Alma says, 'not to ask life what it cannot give . . . reality is not to believe ourselves greater or more generous or better than we are; it is to accept ourselves as we are, for bad or for good, to live our life and follow our path, which is the only way not to be an obstacle in the life of others.' Benavente has indeed made a valiant attempt to observe the psychology, the subconscious minds of his characters.

In his next tragedy, *Alma Triunfante*, we find a more striking example of his subtle method. From the moment that the curtain rises we realize that here is a play responding to Brunetière's theory that Drama is a representation of the will of man in conflict with the mysterious powers or natural

forces which limit and belittle him. It is a play where, as we watch the characters influencing one another, we do not ask ourselves what will be the conclusion built up by the dramatist but by what stages he will lead us to it.

Isabel, the wife of Andrés, has been shut up in a nursing home. A severe operation following the birth of her child and the death of that only child has caused madness of a type for which science has not discovered any remedy. Death is more charitable than madness which robs us of a beloved one. Isabel is considered as dead by all her family, and in the first scene we assist at a consultation between her husband Andrés and the doctor. Right from the outset we gather that the doctor is going to represent the modern ideas of the world. He tells Andrés that the law ought to nullify marriage in such a case. Andrés, however, answers as a true Catholic that it is death alone which can destroy the sacrament, and human laws are of no avail. Andrés is under the influence of the family priest, Padre Victor, who arrives with Isabel's father and mother. Contrary to expectation, Isabel regains her health, and Doctor Hernandez allows her to return with her parents, who have come to fetch her. Then from the clear, incisive dialogue we learn that Andrés, who is still young and passionate, had, during Isabel's illness, fallen in love with Emilia, and from this intrigue a child was born. He is still passionately attached to Emilia, especially on account of his little daughter, but he finds himself caught between two ideas of duty and morality. One is the morality of life which orders him to hearken to his instinctive love for Emilia and the child, the fruit of his passion: the other, the morality of duty, the Christian duty which imposes on him the sacrifice of those two beings to the peace of his lawful home. Padre Victor's inexorable logic overcomes all Andrés's

arguments: yes, he owes protection and love to his daughter, he must expiate his sin by fulfilling the duty which has arisen as its consequence, but this fulfilment must not be a pretext in order to visit the woman who never should have been the mother of his daughter. Without realizing the consequences, Andrés and Emilia have fallen into sin: the Devil remembers that he was an angel, and with an angel's voice is ever ready to tempt us to sin. Human pride believes that it possesses all virtues, though none of them is sure but the first of them—humility. Andrés, like a true son of the Church, hearkens to Padre Victor's stern counsels with humble resignation. Some critics have found fault with Benavente for making Andrés give way so quickly to the priest's plea. They would prefer to see him vacillate still longer between the two duties. In his rather quick acquiescence he appears to be too cruel towards Emilia and his child. But there is no doubt that Benavente wanted to uphold the Catholic ideal, and it was on this account that Padre Eguía Ruiz and members of the clerical party praised the play. Andrés is the weak Benaventian hero, and the author lets us see the full measure of that weakness in the scene with Emilia which terminates Act I. She wins our sympathy by her strong, masterful character which contrasts with Andrés's sentimentality.

As the drama progresses in the second act, we realize that the moral of the play is very much the same as *Sacrificios*. Andrés, like Alma, has stifled the voice of his heart and has agreed to the austere terms proposed to him by Padre Victor, but the tragedy of the play arises from the fact that his sacrifice is too great. He might say in the words of Alma: 'Once we have betrayed ourselves, the whole of life becomes a betrayal.' In Act II, from a conversation between Isabel's mother and father, we hear that Andrés has

found it more difficult every day to act the part imposed on him by duty. His child has been very ill, and the anxiety has reduced him to such a state of mind that the parents fear lest Isabel should discover the truth. When Isabel appears there are signs that the truth is, in fact, beginning to dawn on her. 'I ought never', she says, 'to have come back amongst you. This life we lead now is a lie; truth is not possible. I am the sick one to whom every one shows a cheerful countenance in order that she may not suspect her illness. You are all lying to me and I am lying also. I dare not laugh or weep; I dare not ask you questions, and my imagination flits about like a butterfly, settling now on a remembrance, now on a forewarning . . .; but all is madness, lying; truth never for me.' Andrés becomes tortured by doubts as to whether Isabel has found out the truth or whether she is merely raving. Is he to keep silent or to confess everything? But the true conflict is in the mind of Isabel herself. She is a dead person come to life, a floating shadow of a person, who had the right to tenderness of others only while she lived. She must return to her tomb. The walls of the asylum, like a tombstone, separate those poor weaklings like her, wounded in body or in soul, from those who live and can be happy, from those who love and are loved; mothers with their children, husbands and wives, life that is strong and healthy. She has a vision of a beautiful child that jumps and plays laughingly through joyous gardens; it is dressed in pink, like a big doll, with golden locks combed out by a mother's loving hands. But this child lives; it is not hers. She thus resolves to return to her tomb, and by her self-sacrifice give happiness of life to the others. She reaches the ideal of Schopenhauser and annihilates her will to live. 'My reason is firm and intact; they believe that it has failed . . .

it is so easy to make people believe that one is mad. But all passion has died in me, all hatred, all jealousy, . . . all that is human . . . what remains is my soul . . . my soul triumphant.' That is the climax of the second act. In the last act everybody thinks that Isabel has relapsed into madness, so well does she act, all save Padre Victor, who owing to his prerogative of confession knows the extent of her sacrifice. He does his best to prevent her from achieving her purpose, and tries to make Andrés expiate his fault to the full. Andrés is determined to make the sacrifice and never see his daughter any more. But then Isabel appears with the dolls that used to belong to her dead child, in her arms. Padre Victor in impassioned words tells her that, what she considers a sublime sacrifice, is only a moral suicide. But Isabel replies: 'I did think, as you say, of revenging myself, in human fashion, as wife, as mother; but, am I either? I was dead and could never return: he was condemned by me to live forever without love, without joy. What can I complain about? Only my madness, which as in a dream, brought me to true death. What can I reasonably demand? Life is life, and I had died.' Thus Isabel is ready to sacrifice herself for all, and as we see her on the stage with the dolls of her dead child in her arms, we recall the words of Alma on Doll: 'She was a good soul, and good souls sacrifice themselves in silence.' But what is the conclusion of the play? At first we imagine that the ending will be romantic and that Isabel will insist on her resolve of moral suicide, in spite of Padre Victor. But Padre Victor in the last words of the play explains to us that the sacrifice must not be made by Isabel alone. 'The cross of life is torture indeed, if the soul succumbs to pain, but it becomes a redemption if, when we are nailed to our cross, the soul through pain rises triumphant.' All must suffer; Emilia and Isabel are sisters in pain.

The one must expiate her sin and never see Andrés again ; the other must live on with him even though she realizes that his thoughts are far away from her. How different the ending is when compared with the plays of Ibsen or even Bracco. Bracco would have ended with the disappearance of Isabel to her asylum, leaving Andrés on the stage in torture of mind, the words of 'Piccola Fonte' ringing in his ears: 'Le persone migliori muoiono forse appunto per esercitare su noi, da lontano, quella influenza benefica a cui durante la loro vita ci ribellammo.' In Benavente's play we get definitely put before the public the Roman-Catholic point of view, and many critics have wrongly criticized the play because they failed to understand that. Manuel Bueno, in his excellent study on Benavente,[1] says that Isabel sacrifices nothing, because she is but a dead person come to life, a flitting shadow of a person who had right to the tenderness of others while she lived. But Isabel had not died any more than Teresa Baldi in Bracco's play. When, after Teresa's madness, Stefano is tempted by the so-called Princess Heller, who offers to go away with him, he is still inexorably attracted towards his poor little mad Teresa—the 'piccola fonte' of all his inspiration as an artist. Isabel had never lost her right to the love of Andrés, and this right is upheld by Padre Victor, who represents the Catholic doctrine. Isabel's sacrifice of herself to madness is not accepted, because it would be moral suicide, but her truest sacrifice is in remaining with her husband and in pardoning Emilia her sister in suffering. Some people blame Benavente for making Padre Victor dominate the play so completely. All the characters, with the exception of Emilia are, as it were, his puppets. His opponent in argument, the doctor, is weak in comparison, and it is easy to see that Benavente's sympathies were not on the side of

[1] Cf. M. Bueno, *Teatro Español Contemporáneo*, Madrid, 1909.

science. What a contrast this disillusioned doctor is to the passionate young medical student, Manuel, in Dicenta's play *Aurora!* Manuel is the descendant of the Nietzschean superman; he personifies the full-blooded belief in the glory of science as the redemption of the world. Doctor Hernández fights for his profession only half-heartedly against Padre Victor. He is placed in a false position in the play, and has to give way to the priest, who, by his prerogative of hearing confession, has complete access to Isabel's mind.

In both the tragedies, *Sacrificios* and *Alma Triunfante*, it is not difficult to hear, as it were, two voices in Benavente which develop in strict counterpoint without ever entirely harmonizing. First of all there is the plot with its central idea hinted at in the title, but were we only to follow that plot and shut our ears to other sounds, we should misinterpret the play. The plot is a screen behind which the subjective drama is developed. The dialogue, which in Benavente's play is very full owing to his dislike of stage directions, becomes a medium for suggesting various states of mind, various interpretations of the central idea. Instead of the sharply defined moral standards which had always ruled Spanish drama, we find all the uncertainties, all the doubts of the modern mind, where emotion and will are for ever tugging at one another. Benavente never can develop the ideas of his play with his mind fixed on one side; his spirit, sylphlike, flits uncertain between heaven and earth. To his mind truth is merely relative. Padre Victor is victorious only if we look at the play in one way, keeping our attention fixed on the main plot as if we were listening to the old drama. The dualism of Benavente puts a discord just when we imagine that the chord is about to resolve itself. Isabel is ready to sacrifice herself with all the passionate tenderness

of a romantic heroine, but she finds that her ideal was a false one. In *Sacrificios* Doll has sacrificed herself in order to make happiness possible for Alma and Ricardo, but her renunciation has the effect of driving them for ever apart. We find thus that the titles of both plays are ironical. Alma and Ricardo make sacrifices which turn out not to be true sacrifices ; Doll sacrifices herself, but her sacrifice effects nothing. Isabel is called the ' soul triumphant ', but is it not truer to say that her triumph is a defeat, for she renounces her sacrifice. When we penetrate deeply into these two plays we realize the truth of a saying of Benavente that in life as on the stage, the real entertainment goes on behind the scenes. Benavente behind his realist plot exploits the drama of the subconscious, and as it were gives his characters a shadow which interprets them. And those shadows are the only things which are not pulled by the author's puppet threads.

Sacrificios and *Alma Triunfante* might be called the most brilliant examples in Spanish literature of that modern type of psychological drama to which the public of Europe has become so accustomed. Benavente in *Más Fuerte Que El Amor*[1] and *Los Ojos de Los Muertos*[2] worked towards the same ideals. Carmen Valdequejido, the heroine of the former play, has relationship in character not so much to Doll or Isabel but to Alma. In her southern sensitiveness she suggests a heroine of Lope de Vega or Tirso de Molina. She is born to be a proud, insolent great lady, whose motto might be : ' I shall have the laugh of all and no one shall laugh at me.' But Carmen has the misfortune to lose her father in tragic circumstances. He commits suicide owing to financial difficulties, and thus she is left at the mercy of the world, penniless and abandoned. She is, however, given refuge by the

[1] Drama produced 22nd Feb. 1906.
[2] Drama produced 7th Nov. 1907.

Dowager Duchess of Talavera, who notices that her son the Duke Carlos is in love with her. Out of gratitude to her protector, Carmen marries the duke, who is a chronic invalid. Her life then becomes a hell of suffering because of the jealous disposition of her weakling husband who allows her no peace. She is, moreover, ceaselessly tempted by the vigorous young Guillermo, to whom she had long since been attracted. At the end of the play she determines to abandon Carlos and go away with Guillermo, but on the point of going, Carlos, who is attacked by paralysis, calls out to her in the plaintive tones of a child. He addresses her as mother. Carmen then instantly forgets all her thoughts of running away to meet the only man she has ever loved, and decides to remain and tend Carlos, whom she calls her poor, sick child. It is not pride which makes her continue grimly in her self-sacrifice, her self-annihilation ; it is something nobler, greater, it is a feeling which is all the woman's soul ; something which, if it did not exist, would cause life to be a struggle of wild beasts : it is compassion that is stronger than love.

In *Los Ojos de los Muertos* Benavente deliberately makes use of the Echegeray melodramatic form of drama, with its play of incident and close-knit intrigue, in order to show that such a form was capable of transformation. The plot turns on the same pivot as *Sacrificios*. Juana and Isabel are two sisters. Juana the elder is married to Gabriel, and makes her younger sister marry Hipólito, who has been her lover. Hipólito, after his marriage, continues his intrigue with Juana, but eventually, out of disgust, commits suicide. The play shows the gradual awakening of the unsuspecting Isabel to a terrible suspicion, and the hopeless striving of Juana to evade the retribution that follows her like a shadow. At the end Juana, like Paula Tanqueray, leaves the stage in order to accomplish her sad destiny,

and we are left meditating the old doctrine of Nemesis. In the four tragedies we have considered, Benavente has developed his feminist theory that women are more capable of heroism than men. But even the women characters seem to have read Schopenhauer's philosophy and pondered it deeply. Each heroine finds out that the reason for suffering in life lies in the nature of the will to live. Thus the ideal to be reached is the annihilation of the will. They must resist that instinctive impulse towards life. Doll in *Sacrificios*, Isabel in *Alma Triunfante*, reach that supreme condition according to Schopenhauer when they are ready to renounce life because of love, because they realize the sadness of human destiny. Their will no longer asserts itself individually to the exclusion of the will of others. Carmen in *Más Fuerte Que El Amor*, out of the pity of her heart, denies the will to live, though it can hardly be maintained that her renunciation is entire victory for the Schopenhauer ideal. All these heroines with their pale, tearful countenances seem to moan out to us ' this world is the worst among all possible worlds '.

How different are these sad, languid heroines from the healthy women of Martínez Sierra, Benavente's younger brother dramatist, who seem to have followed Pangloss in affirming that this is the best of all possible worlds. We can imagine Marta in *El Palacio Triste* saying of the Benaventian heroes what she had said of her mother and sisters: ' they must go and live far away from this palace of sadness, far from boredom, in the open air, in the sun, where they will find liberty, responsibility, love.' Benavente is mainly an intellectual writer who lets his cold irony play with the follies of the world : his satire does not kill at one blow, but little by little, by dint of pinpricks. His refined, aristocratic fantasy stifles in his heroines the

desire for life and vitality. Even Carmen, the passionate and proud, in the end submits to that destructive master, and accepts the pitiless life of sacrifice. Benavente by his pessimism recalls Santiago Rusiñol, the sad-eyed artist-dramatist of the Catalans, living in his ivory tower.

II. Romantic Comedies and Plays of Pageantry

The modern drama introduced by Benavente into Spain is bewildering in its complexity. It is very difficult to classify the works of this Protean master because of his contradictions. His personality seems to waver between tenderness and irony, cold logic and sentiment, mingled with a desire to philosophize and evolve aphorisms in the ancient Spanish style. When he softens his mordant irony, it is to evoke the charming figure of a girl heroine who is to contrast with her brutal surroundings. Then the satirist in him disappears and he turns from external events to tragedies of the soul. In plays such as *Sacrificios* and *Alma Triunfante* we notice a slight tendency towards romantic drama. In 1903, the year after the production of the latter play, Benavente, by the production of *La Noche Del Sábado*, seemed to have combined both his satiric and his emotional qualities. *La Noche Del Sábado* is the first of a series of plays dealing with the lives of princes. The characters are cosmopolitan and the scene is laid in some imaginary place where peoples from all Europe meet, where Spanish is not the language generally used, any more than French or Italian. In fact these plays might be said to be the quintessence of the Latin spirit in the modern world. The style in order to suit the princely characters becomes delicate and languid and seems to sum up the qualities of Maurice Donnay and Giacosa. No plays show in higher relief the sensitive qualities

which Benavente brought to Spanish prose. He has not the flowing, conversational style of Galdós or the sober realism of Pereda. He has not the jerkiness of Baroja or Azorín. Rather does he excel by his elegant flexibility, his harmonious good taste. Two qualities dominate all the others: irony and fantastic imagination. Ironical paradox constitutes the characteristic of his literary form, and to these paradoxes he adds his wonderful gift for drawing mental pictures. As Martínez Sierra has said of him, his drama is the drama of good taste. 'United by deep roots, those of early education and environment, to something that has died, he has in his blood the pessimistic tendency of the generation that buried itself in its disaster (he refers to the Cuban War), but he is urged onwards by the victorious impulse of a generation that feels the desire of rebirth.' [1] No play shows better the strong contradictory forces in Benavente's personality. It takes place amidst princes, sad puppets wandering in search of relief from perpetual boredom, yet the moral we are supposed to draw from the play is the lesson of ambition and will to power that oversteps all obstacles. Benavente never gives lengthy stage directions to his plays after the manner of Bernard Shaw: he prefers to let the characters express everything by means of dialogue. In *La Noche del Sábado* [2] he creates the background and environment for his drama by a beautiful prologue which explains in faint outline the ironical idea of the author.

'It is Saturday night. Sea, sky and earth blend in glorious joy; light, waves, mountains, leaves are as the rippling smile of an infant world, ignorant of sorrow and death. Enchanted region of the earth! Deities, heroes, nymphs, fauns were your

[1] Cf. Martínez Sierra, Prologue to *La Princesa Sin Corazón* of Benavente.

[2] Stage Romance produced 17th March 1903.

only inhabitants; spirits of science and love, the only ones who should gaze on your loveliness; idylls of Theocritus, eclogues of Virgil are your poesy; and if a spirit of our sad times ennobles his melancholy by contemplating your beauty, let it be the divine Shelley, the worshipper of Truth's eternal harmony, goodness and beauty; he who did not set bounds to the infinite but adored God in everything. In the ritual of his religion he sang the same love-litany of the holy poet of Assisi, the universal lover; he who greeted all creatures with his passionate love-song: brother sun, brother water, brother birds, brother wolf . . . brothers all . . . and here in this region of the earth enchanted by Nature, see, there comes man. It is the Winter season of fashion: full well has man chosen his earthly paradise; paradise it might be, but men flee from cold climes and bring with them the chill of their lives; they flee from their lives and their lives follow them . . . for them every road leads to Dante's *Inferno*, and thus might we say at their entering:

> Per me si va nella città dolente;
> per me si va nell' eterno dolore;
> per me si va tra la perduta gente.

From the very first word we are hypnotized by Benavente's strange power of mingling reality and fantasy. To aid his intention to philosophize, he lays the scene of the play in an imaginary country between Italy and France, and thus Space and Time become vague as in a dream, and help him to avoid shocking our sense of reality. As a compensation, however, the dialogue with its brilliant spiciness gives an intense feeling of reality to the scene. Each character is determined to act according to his individuality, but ends by following all the others, who are controlled by fatality like puppets. Benavente, according to that device which was so effective in plays like *Gente Conocida* and *La Gobernadora*, shows us first of all their superficial life of appearances, then proceeds to explain what exists under the appearances. In the first scene we are in a palace on the Riviera amidst cosmopolitan surroundings. Prince Miguel of Suavia and

his nephew Prince Florencio are surrounded by adventurers from every country in Europe. Prince Miguel is a weak character, lacking force; Prince Florencio is a morbid decadent whose whole life is taken up with searching for new vices. He has just received with joy the news that he is no longer heir to the throne of Suavia, owing to the birth of a son to the Empress. We should infer with what mixed feelings Benavente regarded England by the fact that two of the most disreputable camp-followers of the Prince are of English extraction. Harry Lucenti is of English and Italian parentage, and has made his fame by writing poetry of doubtful morality. Banished from England, he finds his *métier* in pandering to the worst vices of Prince Florencio. In Lady Seymour Benavente caricatures the reputation for hypocrisy which is always given by foreigners to English ladies. She and her husband Lord Seymour are scandalized at seeing Harry Lucenti well received in society:

LADY SEYMOUR. No one associates with that man.
PRINCE MIGUEL. Pardon me; I thought I saw you talking to him yesterday in the Casino.
LADY SEYMOUR. Yes, I often speak to him, but never before my husband.
PRINCE MIGUEL. And I have seen your husband on the best of terms with him.
LADY SEYMOUR. Surely. But never in my presence.
PRINCE MIGUEL. English propriety is more complicated than I thought.
LADY SEYMOUR. It is respectability.

Another stock character is the Countess Rinaldi, who is as witty as she is wicked. Amongst those frivolous characters there is Leonardo the sculptor, who with disillusioned eyes looks away from this promiscuous place towards an ideal. Leonardo in this act becomes the mouthpiece for Benavente's philosophical musings. The following passage describing

the crumbling of an ideal is a typical piece of Benaventian imagery.

LEONARDO. My father, through devotion to the memory of the Great Leonardo da Vinci, gave me that name: it was a mighty name and one which obliged me from boyhood to dream of greatness. But a great ideal can only be realized when it has been reduced to little pieces. You see; from that block of Carrara from which I was to carve my masterpiece, I cut out a thousand figurines and set them first in shop windows, then in the drawing rooms and boudoirs of the wealthy; they are pretty and charming; the public receives them with favour and they sell well. Instead of a dazzling blaze of inspiration in one gigantic work, there is a spark of artistic grace in each of those toys; instead of the monument which immortalizes an heroic deed and speaks to the soul of a whole people, a knick-knack to support an electric light or to act as a paper-weight. And all will imagine that I am realizing my ideal. They judge my spirit by my works! They see the level sand; but they do not understand that to make it a mountain crumbled away.

How characteristic are these words of Benavente, who with his numerous little one-act plays seemed to worship the miniature in art.

All these characters are speaking about Imperia, who is now the *innamorata* of Prince Miguel. She has had a chequered career. Born in a tavern in Rome, she earned in childhood a precarious livelihood as an artist's model and dancer. Then Leonardo bought her from her father for 500 lire. But Leonardo was never her lover, she became only his model, and from one of his statues she derived her name Imperia. It was in Leonardo's studio that she met the degenerate Prince Florencio and became his mistress, until driven to desperation by his cruelty she left him and now lives at the expense of Prince Miguel. When young she had a lover, who is now in prison, and from that love sprang a child Donina, who has the same passionate temperament as her mother. Imperia is the very antithesis to the former heroines with their Maeterlinckian wistfulness; she resembles slightly Carmen by

her impulsive, arrogant nature, but Carmen is a poor weak thing in comparison. Imperia is not typically Spanish. She has the haughty nobility of the Roman maiden. From her entry we feel that this play is the drama of Imperia's will, her ambition. But it was Leonardo who had by his art awakened it. By dreaming of her namesake in the Renaissance, Imperia resolves to achieve in reality the poetic idea evoked by Leonardo. But she cannot think only of her ambitions, for she has to look to the future of Donina, who symbolizes what she might have been. She herself had been called Donina—but the inspiration which gave life to Leonardo's statue awoke her soul; she became the statue made woman—she became Imperia. She had gone away with Prince Florencio thinking that she could become Empress of Suavia. But Florencio, who is a sadist, ill treats her to such an extent that she threatens to murder him, and is exiled from Suavia. Since then she has lived with Prince Miguel. But she is tortured in mind because of her daughter whom she has left in Rome. Donina represents to her part of her personality, and she looks back with longing and maternal affection towards her youth, which has, as it were, come to life again. But Donina she finds in a circus—the star dancer of the troupe, travelling about with her lover Nunú, to whom she is passionately attached. Thus we find that if the ambition of Imperia is the main plot of the play, the fortunes of Donina, who really symbolizes a part of Imperia's soul, become the secondary plot. In the second tableau the scene is laid in the café of a music hall which is frequented by pandars and prostitutes. Thither go all the royal personages in their search for new pleasures. Prince Florencio, accompanied by Harry Lucenti, tries to find any relief from boredom—that sense of the burden of existence, to which is added an impulse to be rid of the load. Boredom is anything but an unimportant

evil; in the end it paints true despair on the countenance of such morbid creatures as Prince Florencio. By subtle pinpricks of satire here and there, Benavente reveals the infamous depths of immorality reached by the Prince and his friends. As Manuel Bueno says, all these people show us their moral depravity with the same 'nonchalance' as a beggar shows his rags. Over all there watches a prefect of the police called Signore who possesses the wonderful art of preserving peace in this colony of exiled kings and bored snobs. 'I am indispensable,' he says; 'I should like to see this tower of Babel where everything seems so quiet and calm, in the hands of any one else . . . for the difficulty of my task does not consist in informing myself about my business, but in avoiding informing myself about what is not my business.' Nunú weaves a plan to get rid of Donina, for he is weary of her, and wants to go away home to his country. He introduces her to Prince Florencio, who is struck by her beauty. But his manœuvre has not escaped the notice of Imperia, who resolves that she will prevent infamy from taking place. One of the strongest scenes in the play is the conclusion of Tableau II where Imperia foreshadows the coming tragedy in the play. 'In the lives of all of us there comes a night when our souls like witches fly to their sabbath. We live through many hours of indifference to reach one that is of interest to us. Our souls fly out, some towards their dreams, others towards their vices, others towards their loves—towards something far from our life that is our true life.'

The continual reference in the play to the night of Sabbath faintly suggests an invisible Fatality, 'an instrument of darkness' that is to reap a harvest from mortals. The ghosts of Mrs. Alving's past were not more real to her than those witches are to the hypersensitive Imperia. 'I am going', she says, 'to pre-

vent another infamy or to avenge with one blow a thousand.' But it is her daughter Donina who becomes her thought's unconscious instrument. In the dimly lit tavern of Cecco, amid the gross jests of sailors and drunkards, and the tarnished reminiscences of an old hag Maestá, Donina and the Prince have arranged their meeting. Imperia has come in quest of the guilty prince to exact the reckoning. But suddenly a cry is heard from an adjoining apartment : all rush to the door. Donina has assassinated the Prince, and has avenged not only her wrongs but her mother's. The Prince is carried in, supported by his boon companions. Then Benavente works out a grotesque tableau as climax to the act. Hearing the uproar, the police arrive on the scene to investigate. The Prince lies dead on the floor, and all the women and men sing and dance a tarantella in front of the body to prevent the police from suspecting the tragedy.

After this striking climax we should welcome the calm tranquillity of the fifth tableau, but Benavente adds, in between, an act which needlessly drags out the play. He could reply to our objections by saying that this act was needed to develop the personality of Imperia. In the fourth tableau, after the death of the Prince who is heir to the throne of Suavia, her ambition rises with tenfold force. She is the mistress of Prince Miguel, who can be a candidate for succession. But Prince Miguel is a weak descendant of kings ; he needs a stronger will to urge him on to ambition—the will of Imperia. By her strong personality she convinces the signore and the police that they are all bound by interests to say that Prince Florencio has committed suicide.

She frightens all these people to acquiescence, for she knows their true lives, their intrigues, their crimes. The moral, according to Imperia, is that reality can be destroyed, can be triumphed over ; it is enough to

wish and it disappears like a phantom. From the dramatic point of view the fourth tableau does not add to the play; it is full of sententious reasoning which ends by wearying us. Dialogue in drama develops in order to explain the shock of passions resulting from situations in which characters find themselves. This power of putting characters in situations which make them express life is necessary in order to create dramatic action. In this tableau we see the conflict in Imperia's mind between her overmastering ideal, ambition, and her love for her daughter Donina. Leonardo, the artist who has created her ambition, tries to urge her to strike for it, but she determines to save her daughter first. In the fifth tableau the scene changes to a garden of Imperia's villa looking out to sea. She has sacrificed all in order to save Donina, whose health has been ruined by the agony of mind she has endured since the death of Prince Florencio. She is only kept alive by her love for Nunú; but he pretends to be in love with her only because Imperia has bribed him to feign. He desires to go away and leave her to die. Suddenly the truth breaks out owing to his brutal cynicism, and Donina, kept alive by the thought of his love, dies. The same situation has arisen as in *Sacrificios* and *Alma Triunfante*: Donina, like Doll and Isabel, realizes that her presence is an obstacle to the happiness of others, and she resolves to die. She knows that her mother must accomplish her ambition: 'For you my life is an obstacle. Over there the Prince of that accursed kingdom awaits you . . . over there is the white ship with its pale-faced crew which is to take you to that kingdom you yearn for.' Donina dies, and Imperia, accompanied by Prince Miguel, sets out on her mission.

LEONARDO. Triumph Imperia: it is the triumph of the idea! But tell me, when you kissed your daughter. . . .

IMPERIA. What do you wish to know?

LEONARDO. Was her brow cold?

IMPERIA. Yes. Do you wish to know? She is dead! and her death does not detain me any more—are you astonished?

LEONARDO. Your soul is great. You frighten me and yet I admire you.

IMPERIA. In order to realize any great object in life we must destroy reality; we must shoo away the phantoms which obstruct our path, and follow, as the only reality, the path of our dreams towards the ideal, where the souls flit about during their night of Sabbath, some towards evil in order to lose themselves in it and become spirits of darkness; others towards good, to dwell forever there as spirits of light and love.

Thus the conclusion of the play shows that Imperia realizes a spiritual ideal rather than worldly power. Mr. J. G. Underhill explains the last tableau by saying that Imperia, personifying ambition or will, summons to her aid Leonardo, imagination, from whom, long years ago, in the dawn of her life, she had derived her vision of the ideal. Under his tutelage, the material world fades away, until, at the end, she sacrifices her youth, her Donina, who dies immediately, and by the sacrifice, she achieves for herself character, the mastery of the world, and all that is in it, which is the realization of her ideal. This ideal, however, when attained, she finds to be spiritual, entailing supremacy over the things of this earth, but not that crown of earthly empire which in her visions she had seen.[1]

It is difficult to follow entirely this symbolical interpretation which seems in contradiction to the ironic spirit of the author. Benavente, when he started to write this play, had no intention of writing an allegory on the subject of ambition. He wanted to show in all its decadence a picture of so-called international polite society, where princes and their followers drag out a life of weary pleasure. Then, following the procedure which we remarked in *Gente*

[1] Cf. J. G. Underhill, *Benavente*, 3rd series, 1923, Introd.

Conocida, he places in the midst of those fretful puppets a woman of primitive passions and strong character, and watches the effect of the reaction. In drawing Imperia's character we can trace the influence of Nietzschean theories as expounded by D'Annunzio: indeed many details of this play of pageantry recall the famous Italian. Imperia is the only heroine of Benavente of Italian temperament. She is drawn from the gallery of Renaissance types, and stands out in bold relief—a pagan figure. But there is no doubt that she has also assimilated some of the theories of Zarathustra. She is both sensual and ambitious, like Claudio Cantelmo in *Vergini delle Rocce*, and by her attractions she wins her power over men. Benavente has followed D'Annunzio in making his heroine symbolize the qualities and vices of her race. Imperia has risen from the lowest stratum of humanity : reared in a tavern, she had been dancer, singer, and artist's model. But the qualities of her proud Roman stock came out in her character. It is the idealistic sculptor Leonardo who reveals to her her own soul. Henceforth she determines to follow the symbol of the statue and reach the golden throne. This idea is most audacious and in its subtlety worthy of D'Annunzio, but it cannot be said that Benavente has achieved his object. Imperia's commanding personality in the early acts of the play fades away into a filmy abstraction. When Donina appears on the scene the public immediately think that she is going to be the heroine of the play ; then in the last act it is necessary to make Donina die in order that Imperia may achieve her ambition. The fifth act is meant to show the transcendental nature of Imperia, who is ready to sacrifice even her maternal love to her ambitious egoism. The author endeavours to set up an ideal of absolute selfishness. ' To achieve anything in life, we must subdue reality, and thrust aside its

phantoms which confuse and hem us round.' These words read like some of the wild words of Brand in his struggle towards his Utopia. But Imperia is not a spiritual character, and Benavente has weakened the end of the play by making her quit her frankly pagan sincerity. Her character all through the play is blatantly egotistical, and it is useless at the end to make her out a seeker in quest of winged ideals.

Leonardo, with his vague idealism and belief in the power of the artist, resembles a weak and disillusioned Lucio Settala, the protagonist of *La Gioconda*. Like D'Annunzio's hero, he considers the world his garden, and he has shadowy notions of universal conquest. But Leonardo has no will power—he has only that infinite longing for an ideal, and this longing he communicates to Imperia. Thus Leonardo and Imperia are complementary to one another, symbolizing man's temperament full of contradictions. If the protagonists in this play fail to become real beings of flesh and blood, the same cannot be said of the minor characters. The Countess Rinaldi with her witty, cynical conversation, Harry Lucenti the eternal cosmopolitan lounger, Maestá the wretched old hag, Prince Florencio the *blasé* pervert, the Signore that hundred-eyed Argus who watches over this Vanity Fair, all are drawn with admirable suggestiveness. Benavente excels in his light, elusive touches that reveal at one stroke a world. What Leonardo says might be quoted against Benavente in this work : ' A great ideal can only be realized when it has been reduced to our scale and shattered into little parts.' There is no impulse of generous, noble emotion which transforms the characters from abstractions into human beings, as in the Ibsen dramas. All the affections of life, all the passions have to submit to the Benaventian microscope, and the author takes the human soul and pins it fluttering, just like

some rare specimen of butterfly, to the wall of his laboratory. Not even the hapless Donina, dying away amidst the perfume of southern flowers, can take away from us that bitterness of pessimism which we feel after watching those lustreless, ignoble characters fret and strut their hour upon the stage. The author has mingled tragedy with comedy, holding that :

'Our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together,'

but his wit is always sad in its disillusionment.

'Laughter is the most famous gravedigger. We weep over what still lives, what suffers, what exists in our recollections, but when we laugh at anything, whether it be love, beliefs, illusions, memory, it is because it is dead and gone forever. The clowns of Shakespeare are the most tragic figures of his tragedies. Hamlet becomes puny in face of the gravediggers, who sing and laugh between the tombs ; and when their spades strike against the earth, there jumps out the skull of the clown Yorick, to laugh again with that terrible grin of his set jaws. Everything is doomed to die ; laughter alone survives. What is life in its eternal renewal, but the triumphal laughter by which love conquers death ? '

And what survives for us from *La Noche Del Sábado* is that Benaventian irony which cannot weep and so smiles.

If *La Noche del Sábado* is a play of ambition, *Princesa Bebé*[1] may certainly be called a play of youth. Here again Benavente takes the lives of royal personages to develop his philosophical theories. It was published in 1905, but not reproduced on the stage until 1909. Its production by the Guerrero Mendoza Company at the Teatro Español, then the National Court Theatre, though received with acclamation by certain sections of the public, gave offence to others owing to the belief that it was meant to satirize the court. Just as in *La Noche del Sábado*, most of the action of the play takes place in some vague, cosmopolitan place where international society gathers for its revels. The

[1] Comedia written in 1904.

author is more preoccupied with trying to prove a thesis than in the former play, and there is not so much bitter irony. It is as if the rather acid spirit of Benavente's satire was becoming mellowed. Princess Elena, who is known as Princess Bebé to the people of her native Suavia, is a young lady of joyful character, who is determined not to let her high rank and obligations stand in the way of her pleasures. She has married her cousin, Prince Esteban, a self-willed man whose liberal ideas are the scandal of the court. The young married couple have not been able to live amicably with one another, and so they agree to part. Prince Esteban goes off with a comic-opera singer, Elsa Königsberg, while Princess Elena elopes with her secretary, Alberto Rosmer. The first act shows us the court of Suavia, the conventional placidity of which has been ruffled by the awful scandals that pour in on all sides concerning the behaviour of the royal pair. In a bright dialogue with the emperor, both the culprits expose their reasons for action. They are both determined to react against the hypocrisy and insincerity of royal society with its laws, its morality, and its lies.

Princess Elena starts off by proclaiming the individual rights of woman, just like Lona Hessel or Nora Helmer, and we are thus led on to expect that she will make a dramatic attempt to emancipate herself. In Act II we find her in a Casino on the Riviera surrounded by the various *déclassés* whose acquaintance we made in the last play. There is no doubt that Benavente possesses all the power of Capus in describing the peculiar, see-sawing life of the professional lounger and adventurer. In modern society with its drab suburbanity, which increases every year with the advance of material civilization, Benavente chooses a world still enveloped in the pink clouds of fantasy. In those beautiful surroundings along the golden coast of the Riviera, the beauty of which he

evokes by suggestion, he makes those puppets of chance jump in antics before us. We forget the sullen roar and steely stress of the machinery of the modern world with the myriads of toil-stained workmen. These prancing adventurers have no thought beyond their present hour; they are like Mayflies whose life only lasts for one day, and in that day they employ their wonderful faculty for adapting themselves instantly to the unforeseen. Into this society Princess Elena is dropped straight out of her narrow family court at Suavia. We await eagerly for the first signs of reaction in her. What imprecations will she utter against the corruption that she finds everywhere? But the Princess, who claims to be a ferocious anarchist, does not follow the passionate quest of the Ibsenian heroine. She is in search for happiness and wishes to live her own life, satiating to the full her own egotistical desire for enjoyment. But everywhere instead of happiness she find sadness; on all sides she sees would-be Bohemians preoccupied with the same narrow ideas and social conventions which she had tried to avoid by eloping with Alberto Rosmer, her secretary. With him she thought she could reach happiness, because she would be able to forget her rank and title. But Alberto Rosmer has pretensions and social ambitions; he wants to achieve power for himself by his alliance with a princess. Thus he insists that she should lead a strict life which should not in any way compromise her dignity as princess. Prince Esteban on his side has the same difficulties with his actress wife. She is immensely proud of having been able to obtain a prince as husband, and she adopts the rigid external code of morals suitable to her position. When the two cousins meet each other the effect becomes comic:

ELSA (*to* ESTEBAN). What are you doing with Princess Elena? I hope you do not expect me to speak to her.

ALBERTO (*to* ELENA). Why did you force me to recognize Prince Esteban?

PRINCE ESTEBAN. How absurd! She is my cousin, we are travelling.

ELSA. She is with her lover. A married woman too!

ALBERTO. I should not have objected if he had been alone, but his wife is with him. A comic opera singer!

To Elena the author gives all the crumbs of his philosophy. It is thus that she voices her aspirations:

'If it were only possible to be born on the day when with full consciousness and liberty we can truly say that our lives are our own; but not even on the first day of our life can we say that we are born, for we have been living for a long time before, from days of old in the years that are afar off. Life is a forest thousands of years old, and our souls are as deeply rooted in it as the oak. The branches, as they rustle in the wind, seem to our imaginations wings that we flap in our vain desire for air, light, liberty.'

This play is full of beautiful passages like this which are put into the mouth of the little princess. But there is no doubt that her actions are utterly unworthy of her noble words. She speaks like a heroine of Ibsen, and she acts like a heroine of musical comedy. She does not try to emancipate herself in any way from her conventional surroundings. Her one great desire is for frivolous enjoyment, and to secure that she tries to visit all the places which have an evil reputation. 'I have always noticed', she says, 'that the places which people agree to be wicked, are the most amusing.' But her wickedness is only skin-deep, and mainly consists in watching gambling at the Casino and going to a night club. The only thrill of excitement she experiences is when a roué mistakes her for a prostitute. 'For the first time in my life', she says, 'I found out what I really looked like.' Like all frivolous, coquettish women she has a mawkish, sentimental side to her nature. She is very fond of music, but it is waltz music. As she says: 'After the feasts

of the world as after the feasts of the soul there always remains with us the echo of a waltz, a waltz that weeps tears.'

This remark is characteristic of all the characters in the play with their pretentious verbiage. After that remark we are inclined to agree with Ramón Pérez de Ayala when he says that this amiable and charming princess is a delicate symbol of the world of musical comedy.[1]

We might change the title of *Princesa Bebé* to the *Merry Princess*. Her life is a complete contradiction. When her second husband, Rosmer, reproaches her for her frivolous conduct in public and advises her to take life more seriously, she answers him, 'If I had taken life seriously we should not now be together.' Then as Ayala remarks, why has she left her first husband? 'Because I love happiness above all things' she answers. But instead of the word happiness we should read frivolity, and even this frivolity at the last wearies our heroine. She is forced to admit that happiness does not exist. There are only happy moments in life. When comparing Princess Elena with Imperia it is interesting to mark the contrast. Imperia rose from the lowest stratum of life to power by her will, her beauty, her energy. Princess Elena tries to descend from the highest rank in order to lead a freer life, but the task is much more difficult because the interest of those that surround her is against allowing her to descend. Their social position depends on hers.

Benavente has magnified the tendency of former dramatists towards presenting philosophical discussions on the stage in small doses. The cultivated public of modern Spain likes to hear philosophical disquisitions instead of having to read Nietzsche. Benavente, with his trite aphorisms that often recall Campoamor, is

[1] Cf. R. Pérez de Ayala, *Máscaras*, Madrid, 1919, vol. i, pp. 145 ff.

sententious in the true traditional manner of Spanish literature, and where the dramatist or moralist fails, he is often helped by the delicate wit and writer of chiselled prose. After all, we may perhaps accept the point of view of the maidservant in *La Bascule* of Maurice Donnay, who defines the modern stage thus : ' Lâchez-moi donc le coude avec vos idées . . . des costumes, de l'amour, des mots d'esprit . . . et tout le monde vient.' The personages of these plays speak with too much wit and their chief delight seems to be in performing acrobatic feats with words.

The two plays we have just considered derive their brilliant qualities from Benavente's satire. With Satanic glee he takes infinite pains to tear down the filmy veil of fantasy in which he enveloped his royal characters, and show us in detail their pretty faults, their lack of ideals, their false, tinsel vices. But when he tries to make these disillusioned puppets fit into a scheme of philosophy he fails as a dramatist. Yet Benavente is determined like Pérez Galdós to introduce on the stage a critical philosophy of life. Thus gradually the harsh grin of satire softens into the benevolent smile of the worldly philosopher who accepts society and its failings, and his later works become manuals of tolerance, holy bibles of benignity. Benavente believes with Anatole France that evil is necessary. If it did not exist neither would good. And so we understand why the author describes so complacently scenes of vice. Anatole France says that we should not be too hard on the Devil. He is a great artist and a great savant ; he has created at least one-half of the world. Benavente in some of his plays, like *Noche del Sábado* and *Princesa Bebé*, would leave us under the impression that his Satanic Majesty has created the whole of the world. For this reason many critics have levelled the charge of immorality

against the early works of Benavente mainly because most of them terminate pessimistically. But in all Benavente's plays, though there are always the two inner voices representing the different views of morality, it is not difficult to hear that of Christianity with its doctrine of renunciation. Even Imperia, who is the most pagan of all his heroines with her views culled from Zarathustra, hearkens in the end to a spiritual ideal. Princess Elena sees at last that there is nothing else for her to do in this world but resign herself to circumstances. But her frivolous nature is unable to derive consolation from her resignation; she utters the despairing cry that happiness is not possible in this world but only happy moments. She is not a true heroine of the Benaventian stage, for she is dominated entirely by her instincts. If we wish to arrive at Benavente's moral idea of renunciation and sacrifice we must come to *La Escuela de Las Princesas* (produced 14th October 1909), where he sums up his theories of the rule of kings in the modern world. Though in no way so brilliant as the two former plays in satirical skill, it marks a definite evolution in its author towards a serious type of high comedy. Benavente by 1909 had already written some of his deepest works; instead of skimming the laughing surface of life he tries to search deep in his own soul for the philosopher's touch-stone.

The scene is laid again in an imaginary country, Alfania. The king, though married twice, has no heir, and has to place his hopes for a successor in his nephew, Prince Miguel, and his nieces, Princess Costanza and Princess Felicidad. But Prince Miguel has no wish to marry, and whenever the subject of marriage is broached he starts off on a long journey, on any pretext that occurs to him. The hopes of the Government are thus founded on the succession of two young princesses. For Costanza, the elder one, a match has

been arranged with Prince Alberto of Suavia, a very powerful kingdom, whose alliance is of incalculable importance to Alfania. But Costanza loves Duke Alejandro, who is not related to any royal family, and strives to convince her weak uncle that being a princess should not be an obstacle to choosing the man she loves. In spite of the attempts of the Government to force the match, Costanza gets her own way, and is allowed to marry Duke Alejandro. The conditions are that her sister Felicidad should marry the Prince of Suavia and receive in return the priority of claim to the throne. Costanza, like Princess Bebé, has her will, but Felicidad quietly adds: 'We poor women are not to decide our destiny. Our happiness or our misery will depend on a royal decree. After all, whether we say royal order or impulse, is it not the same? Who knows, perhaps when we fancy that our will is being imposed most freely, it is just that we are obeying blindly the fatality of our destiny.' Here, as in other plays, Benavente is setting two kinds of morality before us—individual morality and the morality of duty. Princess Costanza has the right for which all feminists from Ibsen to Martínez Sierra have battled, of settling her own life and choosing her line of conduct. Benavente lets us see that side. But there is also another duty, the duty towards the state which princes and princesses must follow if they are to be the equals of other men. Benavente in this play, as in *Princesa Bebé*, shows how changeable is that individual will. In Act II Prince Alberto has arrived at the court of Alfania, and immediately wins golden opinions from everybody on account of his charm and gallantry. Princess Costanza at once comes under the domination of the man she had disdained for husband. Like Princess Bebé she had insisted on her own way, and had agreed to marry a man of inferior rank, thinking that her love for him would outweigh any

considerations. But to her dismay she finds that Duke Alejandro is looking with ambition to his position as Prince Consort. He resembles Alberto Rosmer in his desire to ascend through his wife's name. Instead of reflecting on his wife's sacrifice of rank and state for love, he sees only the possibility of one day aspiring through her name to the throne. Over Costanza, whose feelings are hurt by her future husband's egoism, the charm of Prince Alberto has an overpowering effect. With the greatest subtlety and refined delicacy of feeling, the author contrasts in dialogue the two opposed characters of the princess and the prince. Each character symbolizes a different point of view ; Costanza might be called the Ibsenian woman who desires to live her own life freely ; Prince Alberto, on the other hand, supports Benavente's reactionary ideas of duty. From a dramatic point of view this prince is an abstract reasoner, brought up on the abstract philosophy of the eighteenth century. He is not the ' Hombre de carne y hueso ' that has always been the ideal of Spanish art, but simply the mouthpiece for Benavente's ideas on duty to the state. He flits about as an idea, but never breaks in on our consciousness as a real character. All he can do in face of the passionate Costanza is to become an artificer of platitudes. It is thus that he describes to the princess his dream of life's ideal duty :

' That life was not what you were dreaming of. Life did not mean retiring, apart from the world, lost in our love, down the path of exotic flowers leading to the ivory tower of our fantasy ; it meant plodding the common highway, lost among the humble folk who work and die for us the great ones of the earth ; it meant fringing with the flowers of our gardens the dusty fields of toil and travail ; it meant that our wealth was not to appear to them as the insolent parade of our vanity, but as work for their hands, bread for their mouth, joy for their eyes ; it meant that our learning was not to be the egotistical relaxation of our understanding, but a sacred love for truth in order that our

laws might be more just, our science clearer, our art more beautiful . . . it meant living for the love of all men . . . that all men might love us.'

And it is thus that Benavente answers the question first asked by Princess Bebé and repeated by Princess Costanza : ' Where is happiness ? ' ' Happiness does not exist, but sacrifice does and sacrifice is the truest of all those phantoms which conceal happiness.' Is not that the same conclusion as was reached by the two children Tyltyl and Mytil in their search through the misty dreamland for the blue bird ? ' Un amour étrange renaît de la blessure ', and in Costanza's heart from her self-sacrifice will there not spring up another nobler love ? In these plays Benavente's muse seems to languish amidst the subtle refinements of perfumed boudoirs. Full of artifices she seems to recall the powdered princesses of the eighteenth century.

The years 1903–4 were romantic years in Benavente's development. He was attracted by dramas full of characters in pomp and pageantry. *La Noche Del Sábado*, with its brilliant spectacle, was followed by *El Dragón De Fuego*,[1] which might be called his greatest attempt at the political style. But Benavente, in accordance with his complex theories of art, has again mingled tragedy and satire in a way that is most confusing to the public. There seem to have been two fundamental ideas in his mind when writing the play. On the one hand he imagined all the tragedy arising from a noble Oriental king, a Quietist, in conflict with a rough world, whose ideal is the man of action ; on the other hand his satirical temperament conceived the idea of lashing the vices and follies of European powers in their dealings with the Eastern peoples. The play unfolds itself amidst

[1] Drama produced 16th March 1903.

the gorgeous surroundings of the Orient, and Benavente has added wings to his fantastic imagination as poet, in order to describe these scenes that recall sometimes the rich setting of the works of Tagore. In criticizing the drama we must agree with Manuel Bueno in saying that the richness of setting has compromised the success of the work. It is formed of too many heterogeneous elements, and the public, just as in the case of *La Noche Del Sábado*, were in doubt on which element to concentrate their attention. The episodes of the play follow one another without any true coherence, and produce a 'farrago' in which beautiful aphorisms and images are mingled with theatrical platitudes.

The poetical metaphors used, the wealth of picturesque details, show that Benavente was in sympathy with the mystical drama of the East. Ever since the first European translations of Kalidasa's play *Sakuntala* were written at the end of the eighteenth century, Indian drama has exercised a spell over European dramatists. In Germany there was a Sakuntala worship, and the stage adaptations of the play were legion. The Hindus, a nation of philosophers, came as an inspiration to the Germans with their love of the philosophic drama. But *Sakuntala* spread over Europe not its philosophy but its heavily-laden exotic colour—its poetry. It was revealed to Europe just at the time when the arid classical poetry of the eighteenth century was dying away before the victorious onslaught of romanticism. Poets such as Gérard de Nerval revelled in the sad monotony and languid lotus. At the end of the nineteenth century, as a result of the revolution carried out by the 'Symbolistes' under the influence of the romantic German philosophers such as Tieck and Novalis, literature came again under those exotic tendencies, and there appeared on the horizon an Indian poet and musician whose works

translated into European languages achieved great success. Rabindranath Tagore, the poet-dramatist, who cries out unceasingly that ' all the black evils in the world have overflowed their banks ', has written many bitter words against Western civilization. In *Sadhana*, which was written before the War, he says that the rival energies of nations in the West tend to become aggressive. ' Peoples are straining every nerve upon the path of conquest. They are disciplining themselves to fight Nature and other races ; their armaments are getting more and more stupendous every day ; the ancient ideal of India was that of perfect comprehension of all, the inclusion of every element in the Universe.' Again he says of material progress :

> On the sea shore of the West
> the funeral pyres are emitting
> the last flames
> caught from the torch of a selfish, decadent civilization.
>
> The worship of energy
> in the battlefield of factories
> is not worshipping thee
> the Protector of the Universe.[1]

Tagore condemned the attitude of the Western peoples towards the Indian ; according to him they were losing their souls for material wealth, and sooner or later their pride was bound to be humbled :

> ' O sun rise upon the bleeding hearts blossoming in flowers of the morning, and the torchlight revelry of pride shrunken to ashes.' [2]

Benavente, in *El Dragón de Fuego*, apparently agrees with Tagore's views, for the whole play contrasts in striking fashion the gross selfish egoism of the white man with the noble, calm self-abnegation of the

[1] Cf. *Philosophy of R. Tagore*, by S. Radhakrishnan, pp. 270.
[2] Cf. R. Tagore, *Fruit Gathering*, lxxxvi, London, 1918.

Indian king. Dani Sar, the king of the Indian kingdom Nirván, does not see the egotistical machinations of the European powers which are trying to obtain control over his kingdom. He is eager to accept from them this new idea of progress and civilization, for he imagines that his people will achieve glorious happiness. He is a poetical visionary, one of whom it might be said in the words of Tagore, 'that the boughs touched his feet with their tribute of leaf and flower and fruit, and looked as if they welcomed a friend'.

Like Marcus Aurelius, he was unfortunate enough to be born in a station of life where action is necessary. The European powers symbolized under the name Silandia manage to deceive this wan-eyed mystic by their promises. They undertake to introduce all the modern improvements into Nirván; electric light, factories, Western education. But Dani Sar does not see that these promises only mask perfidious treachery. The Silandians, with thirst for dominion, only wish to crush and humiliate the weak. Dani Sar is married to Mamni, whose passionate, violent character is a direct contrast to that of her husband. She keeps urging him on to wreak vengeance on the Silandians for their treachery towards Nirván. Thus the principal conflict in the drama arises in the mind of Dani Sar; he is torn by doubts as to whether he should be merciful or whether he should act cruelly, led on by love for his own people. Now and then there is borne to our ears the fateful prophecy of the Fire Dragon. The Fire Dragon has shone in the sky, and to the superstitious Indians this is a sign that God is propitious to them; it is the signal that the people may rise up and exterminate the hated stranger—'death to white men of the blue eyes.' With great skill Benavente by witty dialogue develops the characters of the white government officials and commercial agents. Mr. Morris, Mr. Cotton, and the clergyman

discuss the latest developments in Nirván with the air of men well satisfied with the results of their negotiations.

Mr. Cotton. Diplomacy has saved us on this occasion.

Mr. Morris. Yes, because we sent a powerful squadron and army in time.

Mr. Cotton. Yes, force. In the end it would have meant our logic against the entire world. But on this occasion, we should recognize how much is due to us who, before arms were shouldered, were able to get into our power, or to be more accurate, into Silandia's power, this beautiful district which is worthy to be civilized by us. Our commerce, our factories, the thousand enterprises in which we have managed to interest the big capitals of Europe, have counted more on this occasion than the battleships and the armies of all the allied powers.

The Clergyman. You forget the help of Providence, which is on our side. For we are not in our conquests the fire which burns up but the light which illuminates. Remember that: only by the spirit may triumphs be won. Nothing will be ours as long as our spirit does not prevail. We must evangelize these peoples in order to be worthy of divine favour.

Nowhere do we find Benavente more bitter in his sarcasm than in those scenes where he pillories the hypocrisy of European countries that ill covers their brutal desire for domination. Not one of these characters has any idea beyond his own egotistical aims; even their religious sentiments serve merely to cloak their baseness. 'The clergymen', Mr. Morris says, 'are all shareholders in our company, and we are peace, commerce, civilisation.' But it is not military pressure that they bring to bear on Nirván: they believe in the methods of peaceful penetration. And Dani Sar the mystic, misled by their fair words, accepts the superiority of European civilization—electric light, the telephone, and the gramophone are admitted in his palace—even the music of Wagner. It is difficult to understand Benavente's idea in writing the play. He is scathing in his attacks on white

administration in the East, but what solution would he propose? He is just as pessimistic about the Indians of Nirván who are unable to govern themselves. As often in his plays he is purely destructive without any idea of proposing a solution. It is plain, however, that he gives reins to his peculiar prejudice against the English and the French people. All through his works there are various sarcastic references to the English, and in 1916, in the prologue to the pro-German pamphlet, *El Año Germanófilo*, he definitely ranged himself on the side of England's enemies. There is no doubt that this prejudice in the mind of the author has diminished the success of this play, for it has diverted his mind from what should have been the main theme—the character of Dani Sar. He is cursed by his own people because he has accepted the offers of the white men, and yet in his simple soul he feels that he has done the best thing for his country, for he is incapable of believing them guilty of treachery. The distrust felt by Mamni and by his followers, who tell him that the strangers hate him in reality, only amazes him : ' Why should they hate us? Because their complexion is pale, golden their hair and blue their eyes? Why should they look on Nirván as an enemy country? The sky of their country is dark, and barren is their land. If they love the brightness of our sky, clearer during our nights than their days ; if they love our land which is barren to us but becomes fertile under their hands, why should they not love us also when we greet them with love? What was Nirván before they came? ' But hatred is settling on Dani Sar like a pall. Even his brother Durani, to whom he was devoted, and who had lived with him in the palace, is separated from him by the political schemings of the Europeans. They desire to get any pretext for dethroning Dani Sar and setting in his place the brother whom they have got into their

power. Thus they would be able to obtain complete control of Nirván, whose importance on account of its mines is considerable. Even the palace of the unhappy king is not free from plotters, for Mamni and her father are intriguing to set ablaze the fires of revolution against the King, because he is the minion of the accursed Silandians. The second act shows us Dani Sar surrounded by the clowns of his court, seeking to distract his melancholy thoughts. The Indian drama, like the Shakespearian, set great value on clowns; they are an institution, and assist at the councils of kings so as to enliven by their wit the resolution of the most difficult problems. Kirki, who acts the part of the traditional 'Vita' laughing at his master's follies, recalls Lear's clown by his ironical foreboding. Meanwhile, General the Duke of Ford and the Silandian people prepare a *coup d'état*. A huge tiger-hunt is to be held in the forest of Sindra, at which King Dani Sar will take part, accompanied by Europeans. At a given signal the troops are to surround the forest and prevent Dani Sar from leaving it. Meanwhile Durani is to be proclaimed King of Nirván under the protectorate of Silandia, by the royal troops. The scene in the forest of Sindra has a beauty that recalls the haunting mystery of François De Curel when he describes his native forests of Lorraine. Dani Sar voices its melancholy:

'To this sacred forest have I come, where with all my wealth I could not subsist alone many days. A cruel spot for a King, but for wild beasts a paradise! How unjust are the conquests of man! I am not so master of Nirván and its subjects as the animals are of this forest. In the forest there are nests full of loving birdlings, mothers that have quivered in terror for their young, hearing the rustling of the forest as my kingly retinue passed. We came here as to a feast, and we shall return joyful with skin and feathered trophies, whilst the forest will resound with roars of sorrow from the lairs, and plaintive cries from the nests, where wait the little birds in hunger. Birds and wild

beasts will understand that men have passed this way for pain and death have passed.'

But the tragedy is at hand. Dani Sar finds himself betrayed by all; his brother Durani is mutilated by the infuriated people of Nirván, and he finds that even the Silandians, the Europeans whom he had respected as supermen, have decided to hold him as a prisoner until he signs a treaty which hands Nirván over to them for ever. Durani has died of his wounds and there is no king possible but Dani Sar. But Dani Sar must sign the treaty acknowledging the protectorate of the Silandians, and afterwards must return to his kingdom a mock king. The scales have fallen from the eyes of the poor mystic, and he sees the hideous hypocrisy of these white men.

'I am the prisoner, the slave . . . and in the palace of the King of Silandia the conqueror, triumphant, surrounded by his court, his ministers, his ambassadors from all over the world, I am pressed and urged and even forced to sign a treaty which hands over to them forever my Kingdom. It is not generosity that prompts them, it is Europe that threatens, calling them cruel traitors, and thus they need the shadow of a King to give up by his hands what they have not the courage to take as their own. All that they were ambitious for, all belongs to them! But it is not robbery, it is not pillage; it is tribute which Nirván pays as the ally and friend of Silandia. It is the price of my life and the peace of my Kingdom assured. And all will accept the terms. Some through self interest, others through cowardice. What Silandia did to Nirván and to me matters nothing so long as the worthy diplomacy of Europe has found specious pleas to cover bad actions. And they have found the specious pleas! Protectorate, War-Indemnity . . . and other more pompous words such as civilisation and progress, and other nobler ones, such as clemency and generosity. It is thus that Silandia mocks the entire world.'

Surrounded by egotistical officials, reporters, employees of the European power, Dani Sar presents a pathetic figure. Yet in his desolate position he is the stronger,

for if he dies, their hypocritical plans will be revealed to jealous powers who are waiting for war. As we hear him utter his defiance against those overweening nations we are reminded of those words of Tagore: 'Be not ashamed my brothers, to stand before the proud and the powerful with your white robe of simpleness.' Dani Sar, a prisoner in the hands of Silandia, is dispossessed of all his pride, his love, his merciful philosophy. But as Manuel Bueno says, we envy him, because death surrounds him, death the inexorable avenger of human pleasure. Benavente's philosophy in this play by its deep pessimism approaches very nearly to the Nirvana of Buddhism. It is as if he had penetrated his soul with the doctrines of the *Guía Espiritual* of Miguel Molinos, the leader of the Quietists. Dani Sar shows us there is no way for the soul but to become submerged in nihilism as being the shortest way to God. He too, like the heroines of Benavente, realizes that the basis of wisdom lies in the denial of the will to live. The moral of the play might be summed up in these words of Anatole France, whose mournful irony Benavente at times recalls: 'It is through pity we remain truly men. Let us not change into stone like the defiers of the gods in the old myths. Let us commiserate the weak, because they suffer persecution, and the fortunate of this world, because it is written: "Woe unto you that laugh." Let us choose the good part, which is to suffer with them that suffer, and let us say with lips and heart to the victims of calamity, like the good Christian to Mary, "fac me tecum plangere".'[1] And the conclusion of the play is, according to a Spanish critic, like a handful of ashes flung in our mouths.

[1] Cf. A. France, *Garden of Epicurus*, pp. 112; tr. by A. Allinson, London, 1923.

III. Grotesques

We have seen how the notion of comedy, as Benavente understood it, did not exclude the revelation of the sad side of life. He followed the dictum of Molière in *L'Impromptu de Versailles* : ' L'affaire de la comédie est de représenter en général tous les défauts des hommes et principalement des hommes de notre siècle.' In Benavente's observation of life, at first there was a trace of saline bitterness that contrasted with the generous good sense that we admire in the French master. ' Laughter is above all a corrective. Being intended to humiliate it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness.' [1] Disillusioned in mind, it was not difficult for Benavente to follow this definition given by Bergson, and chastise the foibles and conventions of the Spanish bourgeoisie. Comedy, as he understands it, seems to approximate at times to tragedy, and seldom is the smile of the author far from tears. Little by little a ' rosy, sometimes a larmoyant geniality ', as Mr. George Meredith would say, appears in Benavente's works—the sharp frost of his wit disappears, and we find a warm, gentle growth of humour. Instead of the laughter of satire with its blow in the back or face we get laughter through the mind which is called the humour of the mind. Benavente left off the pose of satirist in order to become a philosopher, and in his plays he aimed at creating a system of philosophy. His tendency towards philosophizing we noticed in dramas such as *La Noche del Sábado* and *El Dragón de Fuego* ; and in *Los Buhos* [2]

[1] Cf. H. Bergson, *Essay on Laughter*, pp. 197 ; tr. by C. Brereton and F. Rothwell, London, 1911.

[2] *Los Buhos* was produced 8th Feb. 1907.

the concluding words spoken by the old professor Don Faustino give us an indication of our author's softened attitude towards the world—'kindness—that is our word: and when kindness opens wide our hearts, sooner or later affection enters it, just as many a time on completing a night of study and extinguishing our lamp that has burnt low, we see enter through the window the joyous light of dawn.' With the exception of the tragedy, *Los Ojos de Los Muertos*, which was written as a *tour de force* and is not really characteristic of Benavente, the plays written in 1907—a year of great activity—are all fantastic sketches serving to expound some philosophic idea of the author.

Los Intereses Creados, which was produced the 9th of December 1907, is a play based on the ancient *commedia dell' arte* with its immutable masks, and on the traditional puppet shows whose characters are worked by coarse threads that can even be seen by the audience. Benavente has made his characters don masks, because the mask immobilizes the action of the play, and from this rigid mechanism that lacks spontaneity we derive the comic. These characters with their gross masks, lacking all sensitiveness and delicacy owing to their uncouth appearance, suddenly at a given moment, when touched by the poet's wand, seem to awaken to the warm life of flesh and blood. Under his inspiration they react on each other, and interpret life for us. No play shows more completely the delicate humour of Benavente, and thus it may be taken as his greatest masterpiece. In 1916 he produced a sequel called *La Ciudad Alegre y Confiada*, wherein he tries to express the aspirations of the Spanish people during the World War. But alas, he was no longer able to inspire puppets with life, and we rarely forget their wooden rigidity. They seem to be but symbols of the author's political ideas. Most dramatists

of Spain up to Benavente wrote purely objective dramas, sculptured in cold, unchangeable marble. Reality was considered from an objective point of view as something rigid and compact; characters were dressed up in the dramatist's theories, and were forced to adapt a constant, unchanging manner of life. They were true puppets, and however much they might have wished to become human beings, they were remorselessly enclosed within their wooden fetters by the author. With Benavente all this is changed; behind the screen of his objective plot the characters interpret themselves and the world. They change from minute to minute just as in life we vary. The character that apparently seems to be a wooden puppet eludes our grasp like a sylph. We cannot make any statement about its personality, for with the fluidity of life it is for ever hovering between the apparent and the real. Drama has changed just in the same way as life; nowadays the sharp line that used to bound our actions has faded away into uncertainty; the fires of Hell that kept our ancestors away from reality have proved to be but rosy mists to the modern Siegfrieds. Benavente in all his plays gives us a picture of our modern life that varies every instant at the dictates of emotion and will. We find thus a fundamental dualism in his works: on the one hand, the ebb and flow of life that is ever tossed about and uncertain, always renewing itself from instant to instant; on the other hand, society with its masks and conventions that have grown up from our desire to crystallize the ever-changing. The essence of drama thus exists in the struggle between the primitive life and the clothes and masks by which men try to conceal its nakedness. No play of Benavente shows this idea more completely than *Los Intereses Creados*, and indeed the play may be taken as the progenitor of the brilliant *teatro grottesco* that

sprang up in Italy during the Great War, through the instrumentality of Chiarelli and Pirandello.

The action of the play takes place in an imaginary country at the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the period when the success of the *commedia dell' arte* was at its height. In a prologue that is one of the most beautiful pieces of prose ever written by Benavente, Crispín, the protagonist of the play, explains the purpose of the author. After relating the plebeian origin of comedy, its peregrinations through country and crowded city, its sojourn in humble village booths and in crowded thoroughfares where it drew laughter alike from the great lord in his carriage and the street urchin striving to conquer hunger with laughter, he goes on to speak of those who ennobled it : Lope de Rueda, Shakespeare, Molière. Then he continues :

' This comedy which out of the curiosity of his restless mind, a poet of to-day presents you, does not claim so glorious a descent. It is a puppet show of ridiculous plot, lacking any reality. Its characters are not and do not resemble men and women ; they are puppets of cardboard and rags, worked by coarse threads, that can be seen even in dim light and by the short-sighted. They are the grotesque masks of the Italian *commedia dell' arte*, though not as joyful as they used to be, for they have meditated deeply in all these years. The author knows full well that so primitive a performance is not worthy of the cultivated audience of to-day. He only asks you to become, if possible, children again in spirit. The world is already old and doddering ; Art will not resign itself to grow old, and in order to appear young it must pretend to babble. '

In the *commedia dell' arte* we have noticed that it was not the custom to have an explanatory prologue, for the chief aim was to awaken the curiosity of the audience as the play went on. Benavente, however, has always been attracted by prologues. In the early work *Cuento de Primavera* (included in *Teatro Fantástico*, 1892) Ganimedes, explains the poetical image of the

play ; in *La Noche del Sábado* the prologue hints at the meaning of the symbolic title. In contrast to the prologues to the old Latin comedies which summed up the plot, those of Benavente suggest lightly the philosophic meaning.

Leandro and his servant Crispín, who have had to flee from their creditors, arrive faint and hungry at the city in order to try their fortune. Leandro is overcome with despondency at their ill plight, but Crispín, who is a native of the free kingdom of Picardy, is eager to draw up a plan for conquering this new city by their wits. He overcomes the timid scruples of Leandro, who is a poetic idealist, and makes him promise absolute obedience to his proposals : 'Place yourself in my hands, for nothing benefits a man more than having at his side somebody to call attention to his merits ; in oneself modesty is but foolishness, self-praise madness, and both those qualities lose us the world. We men are like merchandise, and it all depends on the cleverness of the merchant who exposes us for sale, whether we become of great or little worth.' He then knocks loudly at the door of the first inn they reach, and when the host appears, he asks food and lodging for his master and himself. The host at first is suspicious of these dusty travellers who have no luggage, but Crispín with arrogant insolence tells him that Leandro is a great lord who is travelling to this city incognito. Leandro out of his excessive timidity keeps his eyes lowered and says not a word, but the host takes this to be a sign of lordly disdain, and gives the unknown travellers the very best rooms in his inn and allows them unlimited credit. Arlequín and the Captain arrive ; the former is one of the city poets whose day-dreams have not brought him freedom from debt ; the Captain belongs to the army of the State which has been defeated in the last war ; he too is burdened with debts and finds little relief in bragging of his martial

exploits. The host wants to drive these two penniless wayfarers away from his inn, saying that he will not give them any more credit, but Crispín insists that they should be entertained, saying that his master will pay all. Crispín acts thus under the firm conviction that to advance in their career it is necessary to have poetry and the sword on their side. As the Innkeeper allows credit to Leandro and Crispín, Pantalón, the old financier, follows suit and with him other merchants of the city. Thus rumour begins to spread concerning the mysterious stranger who has arrived, it is said, on a diplomatic mission. The next tableau shows us the house of Doña Sirena, a rather faded beauty, who earns a precarious livelihood as a society 'match-maker'. She also is oppressed by debts and cannot continue to give her brilliant parties where the youth and beauty of the city used to meet. She and her protégée, the beautiful, frivolous Colombina, are discussing their pecuniary difficulties. What are they to do? A great soirée has been arranged for that evening at Doña Sirena's house, but she finds that she has no money to pay the servants or the musicians, and Silvia the daughter of Señor Polichinela is coming, the richest heiress in the city, for whom Doña Sirena is trying to find a husband. At this juncture Crispín arrives as a herald from his lord, who wishes in company with Arlequín and his musicians to be present at Doña Sirena's soirée. By very adroit trickery he persuades the good lady to use her power to bring Leandro and Silvia together. If she brings about a marriage between the two, she will receive a generous gift. Doña Sirena is indignant at first at such mercenary projects, and accuses Crispín of having a knave as master. But Crispín replies that his lord has nothing to do with these ignoble shifts, which are all the work of Crispín the slave. She has only to bring them together and love will do the rest.

'The hard necessities of life', he says, 'may drive the noblest knight to knavish actions, the noblest lady to the duties of a menial, and this mixture of baseness and nobility in the same person does not fit in with the world. Cleverness consists in showing separated into two persons what is wont to be included in one. My lord and I though we make up the same person, are each of us part of the other. Would that it were thus always. We all carry within us a lord of noble thoughts, fit for all that is great and beautiful, and by his side the humble servant who must perform the lowly actions entailed by life. All art consists in separating them in such a way that we may be able to say whenever we stoop to some ignoble action: "It was not mine, it was not I, it was my servant."'

No duty is too humble for Crispín provided that Leandro may soar on wings to his ideal. As he had calculated, Silvia and Leandro fall violently in love with one another. Leandro for the moment forgets his life of a luckless adventurer and gives himself entirely up to his love. Meanwhile Crispín continues his ambitious intrigues and approaches Polichinela, who is the richest capitalist of the city. He recalls to him former days of poverty and suffering, when both of them were galley slaves; now Polichinela has risen up and made untold wealth, whilst Crispín is still in precarious condition. Then he tells him that Leandro is dancing with Silvia, and advises him to prevent her from ever seeing him again. The object of this, as he tells Leandro afterwards, is to make Silvia determined to marry Leandro, for the father's commands will only increase her love. The act ends with a very beautiful scene between Silvia and Leandro that faintly suggests the scene between Lorenzo and Jessica in Shakespeare: It is a moonlight night and the strains of music are heard in the distance; Arlequín the poet is singing. Leandro is tortured by the thought that he, an unworthy adventurer, has awakened love in this pure maiden who can never be his. The music of Arlequín however, with its melancholy harmonies, draws

tears from his soul. Silvia then speaks the words of the song :

Amorous night above the loving pair,
stretches aloft its bridal canopy.
In the velvet depths of a summer sky,
night has fixed its glittering gems.
In the garden's shadowy mystery,
amidst whispering leaves, scent-breathing flowers,
love hides its gentle tearfulness.
Voices that sigh, voices that sing,
voices that utter flaming words of love,
on such a mystic night seem impious
like words blaspheming mumbled with a prayer.
Sweet Soul of silence whom I reverence,
thy silent spaces hold the immortal voice
of those who perished loving in silence ;
those who in their love-death silence kept,
those who in their life for very loving,
knew not perchance love's story to express.
Hark ! I hear that voice float through the night,
and when it speaks of love, murmurs eternity :
Mother of my soul ! the light of thine eyes
shines through yon star that like a tear
of infinite love, quivers in the dark firmament,
Tell the fair maiden of my dreams this night,
that thou alone on earth wert mistress of my soul,
and since thy death no kiss my lips received,
save from the tearful radiance of yon star.

As the lovers remain locked in their ecstatic embrace, Crispín, the artificer of the whole fabric, appears in the background and exclaims aside : ' Night, poetry and love's ecstasy, all have to assist us on this occasion ! Triumph is certain—let courage lead us on ! Who can defeat us if Love be on our side ? '

In Act II, Arlequín, the Captain, and all their followers, come to ask tidings of Leandro, who has been assaulted by a dozen hired bravoes. The report goes round that it is Polichinela, who, in a fit of rage against Leandro for paying his attentions to his daughter, has

hired them. Colombina comes to say that Silvia is in mortal anguish, fearing lest Leandro has been badly wounded. She has left her father's house, hearing it was he who had hired the assassins, and has taken refuge with Doña Sirena. But in the next scene between Leandro and Crispín we learn that the whole affair is another of the latter's Mephistophelian tricks. It was he who paid the bravoes to waylay Leandro, and who put about the story that it was done by Polichinela. Thus feeling in the city is excited against Polichinela, and Silvia is driven to take desperate action. Leandro, however, is sick at heart on account of all this deception; he loves Silvia and cannot wear this mask of trickery in order to win her. It is now that Crispín the 'pícaro' shows all his power. He realizes that Leandro and he are at the crisis of their fortunes, and that very shortly their position will become untenable unless they risk all on a daring coup. They have exhausted their credit and people are beginning to demand some effective return. The Innkeeper who has housed them with such splendour for many days is waiting for payment. Señor Pantalón, following the example of the Innkeeper, has lent them money that they might settle themselves richly in a house. Merchants of all kinds, dazzled by their showy way of living, have provided them with countless luxuries. Even Doña Sirena, in expectation of a royal recompense, had lent her services to help Leandro's love suit. Now it is the turning-point, and all these creditors will come clamouring for settlement.

Crispín, however, has a remedy for their desperate fortunes: 'It is enough', he says, 'to accept what the rest have to offer us. Consider that we created many bonds of interest and that it is the interest of all to save us.'

As he has foretold, the creditors come flocking in. First comes Doña Sirena to tell them how much she

has done on their behalf, and that she will gladly take even half the sum they promised her. She has already found out Crispín's trick to discredit Polichinela in the city, for one of the bravoes is a relation of hers. Leandro then begs her to persuade Silvia to go back to her father and forget him, and he will disappear for ever. But Doña Sirena is quick to see Crispín's argument, and sternly reminds Leandro that he cannot now renounce his project to marry Silvia. 'You are not', she says, 'the only person it concerns. Consider that there are some who staked all on your fortune, and that a lady of quality who risked so much to help you, cannot be thus deceived.' She has even brought Silvia to see him. Leandro then, full of remorse, tells Silvia the whole story of his life, and shows her that he is not even wounded. It was all a trick to bring her to see him; she must go back to her father and leave him a prey to remorse for having deceived her. But the confession of Leandro so far from dimming Silvia's love for him only fans the flame. Just at this moment Crispín rushes in to say that Polichinela is arriving in hot haste in search of his daughter. Leandro conceals Silvia in an adjoining room and escapes through the window. A motley crowd then enters; first of all Polichinela in a fury, looking on all sides for his daughter; then the host, Pantalón, Arlequín, the Captain, and after them the Doctor with his secretary, and two members of the police. All excitedly demand the arrest of the two knaves. Pantalón wrings his hands and calls out 'Justice, justice, my money!' The Captain angrily asks Crispín for an explanation. The Doctor and the Secretary go to the table and begin to write. The two policemen stand, holding in their hands the enormous folios containing the case against the two prisoners. Above all the confusion, Polichinela's voice dominates, asking them whether they thought that their intrigues were going to defeat him. All the creditors then begin

to fight amongst themselves. The Doctor alone calmly observes that no one may exact justice with his own hand, for Justice is not vengeance; it is wisdom, and wisdom is order, and order is reason, and reason is procedure, and procedure is logic—Barbara celarent. He then proposes to take down in writing a list of charges and add it to the enormous list of past offences of Leandro and Crispín. The others, however, have not much faith in the efficacy of the law.

When the confusion dies down, Crispín explains to all that if they want their money, they will not obtain it by punishing two penniless knaves, who can only pay the penalty with their persons. 'Will you be any richer,' he says, 'or any greater when we have paid the penalty?' On the contrary, in order that Doña Sirena may receive her recompense, that Polichinela may not be declared to the world an ex-galley slave, that the Captain may save his reputation as a soldier, Arlequín his reputation as a poet, there is one course open; that Silvia and Leandro should marry. For then the rich dowry of Silvia would satisfy all creditors.

Crispín. As the matter stands, you are all interested in saving my master, in saving both of us. You, Señor Pantalón, lest you should lose your ducats: Señor Doctor, lest all yon bulky pile of peerless erudition which he has been heaping up, should go for nought: Señor Captain, because folk considered him my master's friend, and it ill becomes his honour as a warrior that men should breathe suspicion on the friends he chooses: you, Señor Arlequín, because your dithyrambic flights would lose their guerdon, were it known what lowly theme inspired them. You, Señor Polichinela, my friend of old, because your daughter is now before God and man Leandro's wife.

He then pulls aside the curtain and discloses Silvia and Leandro. Rage as he will, Polichinela is powerless before Crispín's logic. If he does not agree to the marriage, his own name and the name of his daughter

will be dragged through the mire, now that Silvia has already given herself to Leandro. Besides, the rest now look to him to solve the whole question by bidding Silvia marry, and giving her a generous dowry. At last he agrees and the comedy ends happily.

Then Silvia turns to the audience before the curtain descends and explains the true meaning of the play :

'In our play, as in life's comedy, you have seen puppets like human beings moved by thick strings that are their interests, their passions, their deceits, and all the miseries of their condition ; some are pulled by their feet and driven to sad wandering ; others pulled by their hands, work by the sweat of their brow, fight fiercely, hoard skilfully, commit dread murders. But amongst all of them, at times there descends from heaven a fine thread, woven as it were of sun and moonlight, the thread of love which makes yon puppets that are human in appearance seem divine ; and it lights up our brow with the splendour of dawn ; adds wings to our heart, and tells us that not all is make believe, for there is in our life something divine, an eternal truth, which cannot end when the play ends.'

With these words Benavente sums up his philosophy. In spite of his perpetual pessimism he always looks ahead to the ideal of Christianity. However we shut ourselves off from anything spiritual, however completely we hide ourselves behind the masks of convention, there comes a moment in our lives when

> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither.

In all his plays he gives the beautiful words of redemption to a young heroine. In *La Comida de Las Fieras* it is Victoria who gives warm comfort to her husband when ruin in the eyes of the world has shown him how cheerless is the mask he has worn ; it is that vision which animates the souls of Doll and Isabel, who for love knew how to sacrifice themselves in silence. The fine thread appears to the heroines but rarely to

the heroes, for they are too coarse, too earthbound, to heed its radiance. Leandro is not worthy of Silvia; he is said to symbolize the ideal part of man, but yet it cannot be said that he ever becomes inspired. In the love scenes it is always Silvia who uses the beautiful phrases. In the scenes with Crispín he fades altogether into insignificance, and becomes shy and shamefaced before the other characters. There seems to be a slight trace of Benaventian irony in this character chosen to symbolize a poet. He belongs to those dreamers who call themselves poets, but who, owing to their lack of energy and action, never compose anything. In some scenes he recalls the 'Innamorato' of the *commedia dell' arte*, who was always helped in his resourcelessness by a clever servant. His weak amiability in the love scenes remind us of Chamfort's maxim that a man in love is one who wishes to be more amiable than is permitted; for that reason nearly all lovers are ridiculous.

Crispín possesses all the qualities that Leandro lacks and a good many more. If we are to discover his origins we must go back to the Spanish Picaresque novels of roguery, to Lazarillo de Tormes and his descendants, who received nothing from nature but a plentiful supply of wit, and were only able to line their bellies by practising on the stupidity of the rest of humanity. Crispín tells us that he comes from the free kingdom of Picardy, where the inhabitants are vagabonds, and never stay in the same place long unless it be to work perforce in the galleys. 'In the galleys I had leisure to meditate for some time, and out of my conscious wit I accused myself of being lazy rather than a rogue. With more roguishness and less laziness I could have commanded galleys instead of rowing them. For this reason I swore never to return to them.' Crispín runs through the whole gamut of Picaresque exploits until he meets Leandro, and then he determines to make a bold bid for fortune,

Leandro is the aristocrat, one born and raised on beautiful thoughts, whose region is the upper air. Crispín must crawl along the ground, amidst lies, deceits, injustices, and foulness. He sees that he and Leandro are complementary to one another, and so he devotes himself to Leandro's service, thus earning his own salvation. 'There is something in me which redeems and raises me up in my own eyes. This loyalty in my service to Leandro, this loyalty that humiliates itself and crawls in order that another may soar and be always the lord of lofty thoughts and beautiful dreams.' This idea of Benavente seems to be derived to a certain extent from Don Quixote, where we find a conflict between the ideal and the real. The Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance is the symbol of the pathetic struggle to reach winged ideals : Cervantes ridicules his hero's fantastic imageries, but glorifies and admires his purity of purpose. Sancho Panza, though exactly opposite to Don Quixote and possessing a character that is far from perfect, yet is good at heart. He symbolizes the sound common sense and primitive desires of the folk. Though a glutton and a coward, he is so overcome by self-interest and ambition that when he finds out the madness of Don Quixote he determines to make use of it as a means of satisfying his ambitions. Owing to his loyal service to his master and his association with so gentle-minded a knight, he gradually loses his gross, muddy vesture and reaches a noble refinement of soul. We have only to remember the account of his wise government of the island of Barataria to realize how far his character had evolved. Crispín in the same way has redeemed himself by his loyal service to the gentle knight Leandro, but in this case the squire far outshines the knight. Leandro is a modern knight to whom the romances of chivalry are faint echoes of the past, not living realities as they were to the sorrowful knight. Crispín is a modern Sancho

Panza who has lost many of his blithe and debonair qualities in the rough-and-tumble of present-day civilization. He is filled with a more overmastering ambition than Sancho and is not satisfied with a scullion's fare. He looks on his aristocratic master as a weaker mortal because he deserves only the happiness that love can give. 'Do you think', he says, 'that I am as poor in ambition as my master?' Crispín has imbibed the Nietzschean doctrine of the superman and looks forward to world power; Leandro's love affair, which is to bring them both fortunes, is not the goal for him; it is but a step leading him on to complete domination of the city. He is the man behind the marionette stage who pulls the strings for the puppets, and in this role he has many colleagues in the Benaventian theatre. Even in as early a play as *Gente Conocida* we notice such a character in the unscrupulous business man Hilario Montes. This character gives Benavente his chance of looking at human society from without. Crispín, like the superman, can use every passion of human beings, even that of love, to his own advantage. In this respect he also recalls Imperia in *La Noche del Sábado*, that courtezan called after the great Imperia of the Renaissance, who, rising from her humble origin to great power, knows how to dominate men by making use of their vices and virtues. Like Imperia, he creates bonds of interest with people who in future will be bound to protect him. Crispín also resembles her in that ultimately, as we shall see in the sequel play, *La Ciudad Alegre y Confiada*, he looks for a spiritual ideal.

Many critics have taken as the final teaching of the play the remark of Crispín that it is better to create bonds of interest than affections. An Italian critic has shown that this is not a correct interpretation. Crispín, triumphant in the final scene, turns to Leandro and says:

What did I tell you, master? Between them all they had to save us. Believe me: in order to succeed in anything, it is better to create bonds of interest than affections.

LEANDRO. You are wrong; without the love of Silvia I should never have saved myself.

CRISPÍN. And do you call that a small bond of interest? I always gave a due share to the ideal, always counted on it.

But we can answer Crispín thus: 'If even affections are bonds of interest, is it not just as good to create affections as bonds of interest?' The critic is right in saying that the central idea in the play is not the question of the bonds of interest, even though Benavente has perhaps given it undue prominence.[1] In the prologue Benavente tells us the play is a masked comedy that has nothing to do with reality, presented by characters that do not resemble human beings, but puppets. The author thus looks on them from without, and all their actions appear to him to be impersonal, as if performed by mechanical means. They are all ruled by a remorseless fatality, and not one of them is capable of any will power, except when at times the fine glamour of sun and moonlight illuminates their existence. But often the critics have forgotten that Crispín is not a puppet—he is the puppet man who controls the fatality of the rest of the characters. He is supreme because he has freedom of will. Like the heroes of Corneille, he is responsible for his own actions, and the passions and interests of the world he can use to his own advantage. Thus we get a further antithesis in the play between freedom of will, the doctrine of the superman, and that pessimistic quietism which considers that man's affairs are regulated from without. Benavente has generally inclined towards the fatalist idea and we get a supreme example of quietism in the pathetic hero Dani Sar, in the Indian drama *El Dragón de Fuego*. Sometimes, however, he takes the opposite

[1] Cf. A. Tilgher, *Voci del Tempo*, p. 121, Rome, 1923.

view, as in *La Noche del Sábado*, where Imperia triumphs owing to her power of will, and in the present play.

In a peculiarly effective way Benavente has been able to show the antithesis between Crispín and the rigid characters of the ancient *commedia dell' arte*. In each of the old stock types he has suggested their ancient characteristics. We remember how Pantalón in the old comedy was a caricature of the Venetian merchant, miserly and mean, yet with a great tendency to falling in love. Benavente does not lay stress on his love-making qualities, but draws comic effect from his dismay at having lent money to an adventurer. The Doctor follows his tradition as the pedant who confounds everybody by his Latin quotations, and can annul the whole of his case that consists of great folios, by means of a comma. He has evidently studied the directions for Graziano given by Perrucci, and in language resembles his ancestors of the old comedy.[1]

In this subtle play perhaps more than in any other it is possible to see Benavente's complete development. His plays are baffling in their complexity and open up different vistas to the interpreter. It has been said that he is always to be found at the scales, and this is particularly true in this play where there is continual antithesis. He has a particular aversion to definite statements, for his art is mainly one of parenthesis. His dialogue is not the frank and open conversation of former dramatists, when only one meaning could be interpreted; in plays such as *La Noche del Sábado* and *Los Intereses Creados* there is a dialogue of inference where every idea causes another contrasting idea to spring up by inevitable antithesis. This psychological method Benavente employed many years before it was adopted by the writers of Grotesques. Roberto Bracco,

[1] Cf. A. Perrucci, *Dell' Arte Rappresentativa Premeditata e allo Improviso*, Napoli, 1699.

in *Piccolo Santo*, which appeared the year after Benavente's play, in 1908, defines his idea of such psychological drama, and no one has excelled these two dramatists in subtlety; but whereas Bracco is a man of passionate conviction who suffers with his heroes and heroines, Benavente looks at his creations calmly and dispassionately. There is always the faint sign of a smile as he watches his characters strut about the stage. That irony, which cannot weep and so smiles, envelops the Benaventian theatre. He delights in presenting, as the heroes of his greatest plays, rogues who are condemned by worldly standards. In this he has followed Fielding, whose colossal sense of irony drove him to put as hero Jonathan Wilde the scoundrel, who, after all his exploits, was condemned in court by twelve men of the opposite side. But Jonathan Wilde was hanged; Imperia and Crispín are triumphant.

La Ciudad Alegre y Confiada.

Encouraged by the great success obtained by *Los Intereses Creados*, Benavente, nine years afterwards, in 1916,[1] determined to write a sequel, using the same characters of the *commedia dell' arte*. But the Benavente of 1916 was different to the Benavente of 1907; in the interval he had evolved towards different ideals. Thus it would be more strictly correct to group it with the plays written between 1914 and 1920. However, as it is a continuation of *Los Intereses Creados*, we shall consider it now. According to Cejador y Frauca, Benavente never was received with greater acclamation than when this play was produced, and afterwards he was carried shoulder high to his house, and the public paid a special tribute to the mother of the dramatist. Nevertheless it is impossible to place the work on the high artistic level of the

[1] Comedia produced 4th May 1916.

former plays. There is a lack of spontaneity, lack of that subtle irony which had breathed new life and energy into the old masks. In *La Ciudad Alegre* the characters have an air of forlorn sadness, as if the days were always dark and dreary, and no one wished to laugh at their sallies.[1]

There is an atmosphere of unrest in our city. On all sides there is danger of war, and in addition the economic situation is becoming more critical. Crispín (who is now the ruler and called 'El Magnífico') and Polichinela possess all the capital of the state between them, whilst the lower classes are ground down in poverty. The people ceaselessly cry out: 'Who will show us the way; on whom can we count?' They place their trust in a demagogue socialist, Publio, who claims to tell them the truth, but as the innkeeper says: 'The man who tells the truth is wont to go about as naked as truth itself; whereas Publio goes about well clothed.' Publio however voices the grievances of the citizens against the bureaucratic tyranny of the government. Then there arrives at the city Exile, a great popular leader who had been exiled by order of Crispín. In this play he represents 'honesty and good sense' and is the true man spoken of in the prologue. He becomes the mouthpiece of the author in order to trumpet forth his views on the politics of Spain during the war. The solemn words of Exile have a peculiar ring in the city where the young men of the upper classes are occupied in celebrating the advent of a famous dancer, Girasol. Arlequín, who is now a plump and self-satisfied Poet Laureate, airs his cynicism concerning the city-state. His friends tell him that the government wants to enrol everybody in the army. To which he replies: 'What do we want soldiers for? What have we got to defend? What matter if everything be lost; a city that only sets up on high those

[1] Cf. Prologue to *La Ciudad Alegre*.

who have no talent. The only thing we can show to the world are our dancing girls, our horse trainers and our beggars . . . and we are proud of it.'

Amidst all those frivolous young men who are dancing away their state to ruin there is Lauro, who turns out to be Exile's son, whom he had left a child when going into banishment. Lauro is in love with Crispín's daughter Julia, and it is Julia's intercession that has made Crispín pardon Exile and let him return to his native city. Now that the people hear that he has been pardoned by the Magnificent, every one wants to make a demonstration in favour of their once popular hero. Publio the demagogue wishes to be his friend so that they may weave intrigue against the ruling class. By using the popularity of Exile he hopes to make himself more dangerous to Crispín. In the garden of the inn a feast is held at which all the dignitaries of the city, including the Magnificent, take part. We see Polichinela, bloated and prosperous, with his wife, also Colombina, who is still flirting with Arlequín. With them comes Leandro. But what a changed Leandro since *Los Intereses Creados*, where he represented the ideal part of man! The wealth of his father-in-law has made him flabby and cynical. He neglects the beautiful Silvia and spends his time trying to conquer the heart of Girasol. For her love he is willing to risk ruin and cheat his father-in-law. Crispín is no longer the eager-witted rogue of the former play; he is a ruler who, unlike all his subjects, sees the humiliating position of the city. He is the conscience of the people—the Crispín that rises from the Crispín which all men have in their soul. For that reason he is feared and hated. He is the Magnificent—the visible image of those who raised him to his high position. The cowardly Crispíns need a brave Crispín to authorize knaveries which they themselves have not the courage to commit. The seal of the Magnificent

stamps their absolution. In his servant days he was a part of his master. 'Now', he says, 'the city needs me so that it may unburden itself of its sins. I am the chosen one—always Crispín the servant. But the people, out of sarcasm or in order to deceive more completely their conscience, call us who are their servants, masters, and give us a semblance of government, so that the sins of all may become our sin.' He realizes that on him will fall the duty of expiating the sins and base actions of the whole state. It is then that he turns for help to Exile who by his sound sense can tear the masks off these base citizens of the state such as Arlequín. The decisive moment has arrived in the affairs of the city; the Venetians, in order that they may be able to attack the Genoese with more security, demand that the city be delivered over to them. Many of the capitalists would be willing to hand over the city provided their money was safe, but Crispín is determined not to listen to the humiliating proposal.

In the third act the scene is laid in a square near the harbour of the city. War has been declared and the soldiers of the city have had to surrender to the enemy without fighting owing to lack of arms and munitions. But Leandro, who at the moment of his city's crisis had shaken off his frivolous indifference, has been the first to die as a hero. Crispín had said that if in the hour of danger Leandro's soul should awake, the soul of the city would awake also. And the awakening of the city means death for Crispín, who must be the scapegoat for the sins of all. Though he has been offered the protection of the victorious enemy he will not claim it, for the people must believe that it is doing justice by its punishment. With the illusion that its evils have ceased, its broken spirit will reassert itself. Let the city believe that with the death of Crispín and Polichinela there will be an end of Crispíns

and Polichinelas, and thus it will purify itself. He walks alone and unprotected towards the galley in the harbour and the enraged people rush to kill him. Lauro, the loyal son of Exile, tries to save him and is killed. As the curtain descends we hear the shouts of the people in the distance, and we see Pantalón, who has gone mad, wringing his hands and shouting for his ducats! Exile gazes on the body of his son and cries out: 'No, no, my Country, my son.' Though it is tempting to see in this play a critical judgement on Spanish political life during the War, and critics have tried to name the public men to whom the characters belong, it is wrong to push the idea too far. 'The City of Joy and Confidence' could refer to any country in Europe, and Benavente is occupied with preaching a new political philosophy for the world rather than for a particular nation. We must not consider it more of a political play than *En Ildaria* of Jacinto Grau,[1] which was produced a year afterwards. Both authors are pessimists, disillusioned not so much about Spain as about Europe. Eprontas, the hero of *En Ildaria*, enters politics filled with generous and noble ideals. 'I went', he says, 'into public life to give all and receive nothing for myself.' He was a defender of the people, but the people rose up against him as they did against Crispín. And yet Eprontas is a socialist who has devoted himself to procuring material benefits for them without, however, forgetting what is due to order and harmony of the state. Not only is he a failure in his public but also in his private life; his wife is unworthy of him, and when he does meet a woman capable of being his companion, he renounces her in order to follow duty—his only ideal in life. The play concludes with his words 'It costs more to be a man than a saint'. *En Ildaria*, like *La Ciudad Alegre y Confiada*, is set in a fantastic land, and with regard

[1] Produced 29th Oct. 1917.

to construction and development there is similarity. Benavente, like Grau, exposes the ingratitude of humanity towards leaders, and there are critics who say that Antonio Maura is referred to in both plays. *La Ciudad Alegre* has many defects as a play. The action moves exceedingly slowly and the characters engage in long intricate pieces of reasoning. Sometimes so charmed are they by their precious sophistries that they launch off into side issues. The interminable speeches by 'Exile' and Crispín are interesting to read but lose by being acted. In this play the author has devoted such attention to chiselling a beautiful setting that he has been satisfied with a gem of little value.

CHAPTER IV

PLAYS SINCE 1914

Benavente the Moralist

With the production of *La Malquerida* in 1913 Benavente closed a definite period of his life's work. The plays written since that year are a contrast in matter and development. We have seen even in many of the plays we have examined a tendency towards philosophical moralizing, and many critics say that his drama is not a pure èxpression or portrait of life but a critical philosophy.[1]

'His plays', they say, 'are not dramatic owing to overpowering reason,' but the modern public, like the Athenians of Euripides' day, wish to hear philosophy on the stage, uttered in the form of trite aphorisms, instead of having to read Nietzche or Bergson. This criticism is unduly severe if we take the plays written by the author before 1914. Plays such as *Alma Triunfante*, *La Noche del Sábado*, *Los Intereses Creados*, though they embody a general philosophical thesis, have not the defects of the philosophical dramas of Renan. Benavente's great knowledge of the stage and technique, his fine powers of observation which show themselves now in frosty satire, now in mellow irony, made him succeed in imposing his new, fluid type of drama on Spain. At times his poetical power was so great that he was able to fuse his sophistical arguments with the life of the play in a manner that faintly suggests Calderón's mastery in *La Vida es Sueño*. The best Benaventian plays recall the best of Bernard Shaw by the skill in which the philosophical

[1] Cf. J. Cejador y Frauca, *Hist. de la Lit. Cast.*, vol. x.

pill is gilded by brilliant wit and soft humour. The author's real aim in the pieces we shall now consider was to try and create a type of play that should be dramatic only in the sense that Plato's dialogues are dramatic. Speech becomes the action—that speech which consists mainly of argumentative conversation. And Benavente, like Socrates, concludes his argumentative conversations by some fanciful symbol which mythlike caps the teaching of the play. In *Collar de Estrellas* Don Pablo, the hero, invokes the starry necklace in the sky as a symbol of the family. In *Campo de Armiño*, Irene, the marchioness, will place on the ermine field of her armorial shield a lily symbolizing the redemption of her soul. Benavente, by the insertion of those little allegories, renders more palatable to the public his moral treatises. It is probable that this symbolical tendency he derived not from Plato, but from Ibsen, who intensifies his drama and stamps it indelibly on the mind of the audience by some picturesque parable.

In *El Collar de Estrellas*,[1] the hero of the play, Don Pablo, like Marcus Aurelius, desires to live on a mountain, so that he may be far removed from men. He does, in fact, live in the top floor of his house, and he has installed there a telescope through which he looks at the stars, thus liberating his soul from the earth. To him the stars breathe their message, and he would say :

> There 's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest
> But in his motion like an angel sings.

Don Pablo resembles Orozco in *Realidad* by Galdós, not only owing to his philosophical character and desire for solitude, but also on account of his charitable disposition. He loves to give charity but does not want to receive thanks, for he regards his mission in life to

[1] Comedia produced 4th March 1915.

preach love and goodwill to all men. It is for this reason that he undertakes, after the death of his brother Julio, to support his wife and family, and allots to them the lower part of his house. But the widow Isabel and her mother are weak and shiftless ; they are not able to control the sons who are all selfish and idle. The end of the play results in the triumph of the family through the instrumentality of Don Pablo. He brings them all together in harmony, and he will be their protector. When Juana, his old servant, asks him whether he will return to his star-gazing, he answers explaining the symbol of the whole play : ' Above in the sky the necklace of stars will shine more brightly, lit up by love which is the divine will.'

The necklace of stars shining in the sky is the symbol of the family, and the author means the whole play to be an idealization of the homely virtues. All the members of the family must work together and sacrifice some of their liberty in order to reach that divine harmony. They must accept their life just like that Pascal in *La Croisée des Chemins* by Henri Bordeaux—' il accepta sa vie naturellement enchainée comme toutes les vies humaines, car il n'y a pas d'hommes libres et c'est avec la mort la seule égalité.'

Campo de Armiño

Campo de Armiño,[1] like *El Collar de Estrellas* is a symbolical play. Benavente in this period of his work always feels the necessity of treating transcendental ideas, of which, though their essence be beyond our comprehension, he can yet give to us a shadowy presentiment. He seems, as symbolist, to claim that he is an inspired being, like those poets who, according to Plato, have their sex concealed by the gods and are used by them as seers, so that men listening to them

[1] Comedia produced 14th Feb. 1916.

may know that it is not the voice of the poet, but the voice of God which is really speaking. In *El Collar de Estrellas* the starry constellation symbolized the unity of the family as an ideal to guide humanity. In *Campo de Armiño* Benavente follows the ideals set out by Galdós in the plays *Alma y Vida*, *Mariucha*, and *El Abuelo*. The arms of the Marchioness Irene de Montalbán's shield will have added to them the lily of her adopted son, whiter even than their ermine field. As in *Alma y Vida* there is in this play the idea that the strong blood of the people mixing with the impoverished blood of the ancient nobility will strengthen the race. In *Alma y Vida*, the sturdy Juan Pablo by his vigorous influence brings new life to the weak, filmy Laura de Ruy Diaz. In *Campo de Armiño*, Gerardo, Irene's adopted son, will give her new, vigorous ideals to take the place of her former inaction. As in *Mariucha* we see the triumph of a new caste founded on love, which is above the old conventions of society, so in Benavente's play, Irene de Montalbán, the aristocratic revolutionary, desires to restore love to its primitive truth. Like Mariucha she cries out that there must be health, force, bodily beauty, love in all its truth. 'What have we done with true love?' she cries. 'Between morality, poetry and all types of literature, economic arguments and social distinctions, we have inverted values. True love now appears vice to us, and in return we give the name love to a thousand sentimental perversions which impoverish and sadden our life.' It is hard to realize that this evangelical passage is not by Galdós; it seems alien to the neat 'atildado' spirit of Benavente, who, rather than be a revolutionary, had so far always preferred the sadder alternative of renunciation. In this play we also find a reference to the theory of heredity which has appeared in drama since Ibsen consecrated it in *Ghosts*. Irene and her family resemble the Count de Albrit in

El Abuelo, when they eagerly note every action of the adopted youth Gerardo, to see whether he shows traces of inherited evils of character.

Though Irene is a character at times almost abstract, she is one of the noblest heroines of this section of Benavente's work. In each act the author adds to her character by making her more human, and at the end of the play, when Gerardo, whom she had cast away, returns to her to beg piteously for assistance, we see the triumph in her of a mother's love. In spite of all the calumnies of the world which will essay to tarnish her reputation, she will look on Gerardo as her son. 'In the light of my soul a son of mine is born, who is the mystery of love and redemption to me. And on my shield I shall place the new heraldic device of a lily whiter than the ermine.'

When seeking to explain the reason why this play met with so little success on its production by such a famous actress as Señora Guerrero, we must remember that, in spite of the fine development of character of the marchioness Irene, the play has the defects of prolixity that may be noticed especially in *El Collar de Estrellas*. The action at times is in abeyance whilst the principals tell us the experiences of their souls, often illustrating their remarks by long parables. The general public that crowds a theatre is not prepared to take for granted Benavente's thin and often banal outer plot, and look beyond into the deep interpretation of character. It wants more action and less words, and it has not yet, at any rate in Spain, accustomed itself to the purely interior drama where action springs from the antithesis working in the mind as the result of some outer motive. And Benavente was not satisfied with developing psychological drama ; he was at this time also trying to infuse into his work moral ideals which at times do not ring sincerely. There is always the contest between Benavente the satirist-humorist and

Benavente the moralist, and often we in the audience believe that the latter is only the former disguised.

The central idea of *El Mal que Nos Hacen*[1] is but a development of the central idea of *La Propia Estimación*.[2] 'In order to accept the evil that is done to us we must understand that it is a punishment for evil that we ourselves have done.' As Señor Manuel Machado has shown in his excellent analysis of the play, the surroundings, the external events, do not interfere at all. 'In the dramatic conflict between these two hearts, the sick one infects and destroys the healthy, but before doing so it destroys itself by a very refined, subtle and cruel analysis.'[3] The problem discussed is entirely one that rises from within the recesses of the hearts of Germán and Valentina, and we must bear clearly in mind the principal characteristics of each.

Germán is a man of mature age and rich. His marriage was a failure and his wife left him; he then paid court to a certain frivolous girl, Adela, who made him pay dearly for his infatuation by proving unfaithful to him on many occasions. He becomes acquainted with Valentina at the house of this woman, and she quickly manages to console him and cause him to transfer his affections to her. Germán is a hypersensitive, neurotic wreck and lacks the virile qualities of the Spanish hero. Owing to his faculty for minute self-analysis he seems to have sprung from a Bourget novel of the type of *Le Disciple*. Tortured in mind by feelings of jealousy lest any one should covet his mistress, he recalls Francesco Floriani, the psychoanalyst doctor in Bracco's play *I Pazzi*,[4] who tortures his wife by his cruel suspicions that she has been guilty of adultery in thought, or what might be called

[1] Comedia produced 23rd March 1917.
[2] Comedia produced 22nd Dec. 1915.
[3] Cf. Manuel Machado, *Un Año de teatro*, 1917.
[4] Published 1922.

'Platonic adultery'. Germán is jealous even of the thoughts of Valentina, and as his character develops through the play we feel that the fitting end for him will be not the love of a sane woman, but Doctor Floriani's hospital for neurasthenic wrecks.

The whole play shows the ceaseless struggling between Germán and Valentina. Valentina's open, generous nature gradually becomes undermined by her lover's jealous suspicions. She had modelled herself on him and had reflected all his thoughts and passions, for as Benavente had said in *Propia Estimación*—'Love is nought else but a mutual work of art wherein we realize the thought of him who loves us, and in the object of our love we see our thoughts realized.' That thought of Benavente can be put even more clearly in the words of Saint François de Sales—'La volonté change de qualité selon l'amour qu'elle épouse. S'il est charnel elle est charnelle, spirituelle s'il est spirituel, comme la femme change sa condition en celle de son mari, et devient noble s'il est noble, reine s'il est roi, duchesse s'il est duc.' And Germán's mean character reacts on Valentina, taking away all her bloom.

'All the evil that you suffered from others you have avenged on me,' says Valentina to Germán, 'and the cruellest evil you have done to me, and the one that I cannot forgive, is that you have made me begin to lose faith in myself.' She cannot understand how it is possible to be happy when her love cannot make Germán so. Hence she leaves him for ever and goes to the man who had been her friend in childhood and had loved her in silent adoration. To this weak youth, for whom she feels compassion, she will devote her life and realize the same ideal of sacrifice as Carmen in the drama *Más Fuerte que El Amor*. Germán in vain tries to regain her love, but the evil fatality is inexorable, and the play ends with his hopeless appeal to the spirit of happiness that has flown away for ever.

In many of the plays of Benavente we find an inversion of the dramatic ideals which had been accepted up to his time. In stage-technique he reversed the procedure followed by former writers, and, instead of laying stress on the actual arguments advanced by the characters, concentrated on the subtle inferences to be drawn from dialogue. Mr. J. G. Underhill has very well said that Benavente's theatre is founded on equivocation.

'The literatures of the Latin peoples', he says, 'have habitually been hospitable to secondary meanings and "double entendre." The idea is unmasked by veiling it. It was apparent to Benavente that here was a medium which was susceptible of wholly different application. The mind is alive with reticences and reservations far more interesting than any ideas which it may see fit to express. Benavente developes this system of "doubles ententes" into a system of multiple ententes in which he attempts to realise upon the stage the inarticulate as well as the articulate elements of intellect and character.' [1]

Benavente's plays are thus exceedingly complex when he tries to interpret the thought of the sub-conscious: owing to his perpetual desire for analysis he has the faults as well as the virtues of Roberto Bracco, the author of *Tragedie dell' Anima* and *Piccolo Santo*.

The importance of Benavente in modern Spanish drama can be gauged from the fact that he introduced a new spirit which had been already noted in France and Italy. In the philosophy of twentieth-century Europe there is to be found a spirit of the anti-intellectual and the anti-rational. The idea of reality from being immovable becomes entirely relative. What is real is not only that which has always been admitted to be so, but also everything that appears to us real when under the strong influence of an emotion. A dream which we have dreamt profoundly is a reality to us.[2] Thus what is real to one may not be so to

[1] Cf. J. G. Underhill, Introd. to vol. ii of the *Plays of Benavente*.
[2] Cf. A. Tilgher, *Studi sul drama Contemporaneo*, p. 181.

another. Professor Adriano Tilgher, in his book on drama, says: 'Pirandello discovered that the human soul is not the simple two dimensional thing it had always been considered.' We might apply this remark to Benavente and add that he has explored the recesses of the Spanish soul and revealed the curious phantoms that lurk in those shady hiding places.

In the next play, *La Inmaculada de Los Dolores*,[1] which was produced the day after the frivolous operetta *La Mefistófela*, Benavente develops a highly anti-rational subject.

Asunción, the heroine, a young lady from the country, poor but beautiful, becomes engaged to the only heir of an ancient and noble house. It is only through family reasons that she agrees to marry this degenerate youth, whose weak body and mind cause her a feeling of repulsion. Before the marriage takes place, however, the young man dies, and Asunción, to please his parents, puts on widow's weeds and agrees to mourn him as if she had really been married. In order to please her parents-in-law she continues her mourning, and in return her own parents and sisters receive many advantages from the rich family. Three years have elapsed when the play opens, and by this time a halo of romance surrounds Asunción: everybody in the town of Moraleda believes that she lives a life of renunciation, sacrificed to the egoism of the marquis and marchioness Del Encinar. But Asunción sees her past through the eyes of a Spanish mystic: she idealizes her recollections of her dead fiancé. Instead of seeing him as a degenerate dolt possessed of no good qualities, she finds, as time goes on, a new vision of him arising in her mind—a sylphlike, celestial vision which she loves as the child of her phantasy. To this vision Asunción dedicates her whole life with the ardour of a mystic. The woman's irrational nature recalls some

[1] Stage romance produced 30th April 1918.

of the characters of Pirandello, especially Enrique IV,[1] who in his madness creates for himself a brilliant life in the past.

In the last act we perceive a blossoming forth of some genuine feeling. The two young men, strangers to the town, who had appeared in the first act, come to take leave of Asunción's old uncle Jerónimo, who owns a stationery shop. Asunción, who, in addition to her other virtues, aspires to being democratic, helps him in his shop and so meets the strangers. One of them, Carlos, has fallen a victim at sight to her charms, but as he is of a romantic Wertherlike nature he determines to renounce his love and go away from the town, not however without writing a short story about the saintlike Lady of Sorrows. The manuscript of this story he gives when parting to the uncle. When the two young men have gone, the uncle, in a voice faltering with emotion, reads the story of a beautiful intelligent girl whose beauty and intelligence frightened men away. Asunción when she hears the story of her own soul, written by a man who, she knows, loves her, becomes at last more human. But the young author has already gone away.

Asunción. You see, he admired, he understood, and yet he went his way. The traveller passed through the city which lay plunged in its legendary recollections, and did not dare to awake her.

Carlos, unlike the poor dead betrothed, had not the courage to claim his love, and thus Asunción is left saying sadly that there is nothing in the world but recollection. But perhaps there is the hope in her heart that this time the traveller may return and put an end to the life of the past.

In this play Benavente has tried to follow Andreev's 'theatre of the soul' and develop expressionist drama.

[1] Produced 1922.

Like Andreev he is only occupied with the soul and mind of a single person, and the other characters are nothing but minor puppets, for their existence depends entirely on the personality of the protagonist. In this play he has tried to copy the celebrated Russian's plan of setting solitary characters to wrestle with their fears and their passions. Like Andreev, too, he tries, in his attempt to withdraw into the innermost recesses of the soul, to dispense with action altogether.

The next play, *La Ley de Los Hijos*,[1] is a contrast to *La Inmaculada de Los Dolores*. It is written with greater sincerity and emotion. Benavente's one overmastering feeling, pity, here finds a fit subject in the history of a wife and mother who has to suffer inexorable retribution for a sin committed in a moment of thoughtless folly. The moral is the same as in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—the past life with its sins can never be blotted out. Benavente has adopted a procedure different from Pinero's. Instead of setting a brilliant, dangerous Paula, and watching her gradual decline to romantic suicide, he shows us a broken-down heroine who craves the forgiveness of her husband, and tries in vain to rehabilitate herself in the eyes of the world. There is none of the romantic atmosphere of 1893 about this play ; it is steeped in that sad disillusion which Benavente seems to have drawn from the times. But Benavente, though he ends with the triumph of society, always shows the utmost pity for his heroine who has to bear the cost. Paulina is not the poor, vulgar, degraded woman like Paula Tanqueray, who tries to raise herself up. She knows that she must expiate her sin not only to her husband, but to her children. When we have neglected our sacred duties it is not possible to undertake them whenever it suits us : duties must be performed every day, every hour, and the duty of a mother can never be interrupted or

[1] Drama produced 23rd December 1918.

forgotten. It is not a whim or caprice of the heart. Thus, the author seals his play with the moral law of the children—that law which, as Paulina says to her husband, has prevailed over his pardon. 'It is the children who condemn even when they wish to pardon; for without saying anything, they tell us that once we have forgotten our duties as a mother, we can never be one any more.' Paulina will not remain in that house where she would only bring pain and sorrow. She will go away like a stranger who has disturbed their life for a moment. The play ends with her sad words: 'Divorce is not a law of men; it is a law of the children, and being of the children it is a law of God.'

In Spanish dramas of the 19th century up to the coming of Benavente, the rights of the child were but seldom voiced. None of the pompous, prancing heroes of Echegeray with their rigid code of honour ever had much leisure to bethink them of their sacred duties towards the coming generation; they are perpetually torn between honour and passion. But with the coming of the 1898 generation all the new social problems that were agitating Europe find their place in the Spanish mind, and authors like Galdós, Benavente, and Martínez Sierra year by year continue educating. Whereas, however, most of the dramatists of Europe have drawn their inspirations from the revolt of woman and her consequent advance to anarchical ideas, Benavente and Martínez Sierra have idealized woman's power of self-sacrifice to her family. Marriage to these authors is not an *instrument de jouissance*, but a bond involving sacred duties. Benavente, in an interesting article in the collection *De Sobremesa*, has given his ideas on marriage and divorce. This question, he says, is one which we should all have resolved in our consciences. The whole question can be put thus: 'Are you believers in the sanctity of

matrimony as a sacrament of the church? If you do not believe in it, then are you inclined to believe just out of regard for social respectability? In the latter case there is no need to talk of divorce. Do you think that your conscience can outweigh all the conventions of society? If you do, then do not get married. There you have the question of divorce resolved.' Benavente cannot admit that the Church should sanctify marriage as a sacrament, and then when the parties concerned tire of love, that the law should step in and permit the dissolution of the holy bond with the full approbation of society. Unlike Manuel Linares Rivas, also a conservative, Benavente did not see the injustices which the strict religious bond imposes. Linares Rivas, possessed of a more inquiring spirit, wrote in 1914 his striking play *La Garra*, in which he cries out against cases of injustice. Benavente's views we might sum up in his own words: 'Marriage is not sacred because it is love, but because from love spring duties which sanctify it.' With the author we may weep for the sad departure of Paulina, but we feel that in this case the divine justice which is always present to the Spanish mind has been vindicated.

In *La Vestal de Occidente*[1] Benavente dramatized the life of Queen Elizabeth. Historical drama, as Mr. Ashley Dukes would say, is a masquerade of the contemporary spirit, and in this play we see, not a portrait of the Virgin Queen, but one of Benavente. We shall find what he thinks about her and about Elizabethan England in general, concerning which he has always displayed great interest. Following the expressionistic method of the latter plays Benavente has not paid very much attention to incident or situation; he is occupied entirely with discovering the inner truth of Elizabeth's character for us with the same power of mental dissection that we have seen

[1] Drama produced 29th March 1919.

in the case of the other heroines such as Irene de Montalbán or Asunción. Elizabeth's character is presented subjectively, and we feel that she goes through the play not listening to any of the other characters, not even Essex, so intent is she on unveiling to us her soul. The part was written for that great actress María Guerrero, who has always excelled in the subtle psychology of character.

Benavente has chosen for his play the later years of the Queen's reign, when old age and anxiety had cast a shadow over her mind. She cannot resign herself to being old, as she feels that her spirit is young. For this reason she has chosen as favourite the valiant young Earl of Essex, whose dictatorial manner and headstrong passions had alienated many of the court. The older men, especially Raleigh, look on this young upstart with jealousy, and do their best to plot against him. Elizabeth, as Benavente shows, was very much in love with Essex and was always ready to pardon him his escapades. She knows, however, that her changeable humour is never to be relied on, and that dangers are sure to threaten the life of her favourite. For this reason she gives him a ring to wear, which he must return to her if he ever finds himself in danger, and all will be pardoned to him. The expedition of Essex to Ireland proves his undoing: he had sworn when setting out that he would bring back rebellion broached on his sword, whereas in fact he became an easy prey to Irish flattery, and returned without effecting anything. In the second act Benavente gives us a scene between the angry queen and her headstrong courtier. Elizabeth is wearing her mask of English Queen, and in her haughtiness she cannot brook the pride of Essex, because she thinks he wants to play the master. Her love for him for the moment is forgotten, and there is also the desire in her heart to make him suffer. She puts him under arrest. No sooner has he been led away

than her feelings overmaster her. From the history books we get the idea that Elizabeth condemned Essex because, as in the case of Mary, Queen of Scots, she was always able to conquer her feminine weaknesses where the safety of the country was concerned. Even when she was a grey and wrinkled woman she delighted in receiving all the adulation which was heaped on her by the most polished courtiers England has ever seen, but when she turned her thoughts to the government of the country, whose power she held as a sacred trust for the people, she became stern and unbending even to her dearest friends. Benavente, on the other hand, makes Elizabeth more human in her emotions, and more under the influence of sexual attraction towards Essex. She does not care a rap about his conduct in Ireland—she had been in agony as to his safety all the time he had been away. But Essex will not ask her pardon because he would consider it a humiliation. Elizabeth's pride is hurt because he does not rely on her to save him. 'In his pride', she says, 'he would be capable of facing death—for I am sure they will demand his death. It is justice—that English justice which is the same for every one. We shall see whether he will consent to humble himself and beg from me his life—aye, his life; if he only knew what his life is to me.'

The pride of Essex prevents him from begging forgiveness from the Queen; he prefers to go to the Tower, and while there he engages in a desperate plot against the Government—a plot which turns out a miserable failure. Benavente in the third act shows his downfall, but this is but a preparation for the last act. He was not interested in the fate of Essex but in the effect it would have on the Queen. Essex in the end bethinks him of the ring, and dispatches it to the Queen. By the rascality of some courtiers, his enemies, the ring is never delivered, and he goes to his doom

unreprieved. In a long soliloquy Elizabeth reveals her innermost thoughts. She knows that her sentence on Essex has been unjust and that he has never been a traitor to the love and trust she had placed in him :

'Yet with an irresistible, secret joy I allowed suspicion to transfix my heart in ecstasy of torture—it was a joy to suffer for him, for he also was suffering, aye, he was suffering for me. And so I delivered him over to death, jealous of his life, jealous of a single thought of his that was not mine, jealous of any desire that I could not satisfy, jealous of a single ambition which I could not destroy. It was my pride to feel that he was my creature, as though he was sprung from me. It was not enough for me to be his queen, I should even have wished to be his God, and thus I have usurped from God the terrible power of inflicting death. Death, Death ! What is death ? Are we not all of us condemned to death ? What boots it whether we know not the day, if we know that it must come ? '

In this beautiful passage Benavente makes all his striking powers of rhetoric swell to a splendid climax. He has so steeped his spirit in the historic dramas of Shakespeare that he has succeeded in breathing some of that Titan spirit into his prose. The character of his Elizabeth rises up in all its tragic, solitary grandeur in this soliloquy ; there is never the feeling that a Benaventian heroine has merely clothed herself in the gorgeous robes of the English Queen. We notice the characteristics of the Benaventian heroine, but in this play the author has so exalted and ennobled the character that for once in the modernist Benavente we reach the truth of the Aristotelian definition of Tragedy : 'Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude.' There is also the idea of waste which Professor Bradley says is the centre of the tragic impression. With Benavente, as with Shakespeare, the pity which we feel seems to unite with, and even to merge in a profound sense of sadness and

mystery which is due to this impression of waste.[1] Why should all this great, noble passion which Elizabeth and Essex felt for one another only torture itself and throw itself away? Benavente also brings in the Shakespearian idea of divine justice. The ultimate power or order is moral. There is no trace of a fixed immutable fatalism in this tragedy, as if the actions of the characters concerned were fixed beforehand without regard to their feelings and thoughts. In this play we find an echo of the δράσαντι παθεῖν of the *Agamemnon*, 'The doer must suffer.' Essex and Elizabeth, though of noble natures, yet met the fate that always lies in wait for the ambitious and the proud.

Elizabeth had a fierce, passionate nature, quick to be aroused, in addition to all the petty vanities which woman is heir to. The feeling of intense sadness which we get at the end of the play is aroused in us because we see how feeble the proud queen is before the sorrow of humanity. Benavente has also raised the tragedy by showing how Fatality had for ever loomed over the unhappy monarch:

'Has not the axe of the executioner forever been as the star of my destiny? That axe which gave my mother unto death; rival queens are we, mother mine. It was nature's law that I should fondly cherish the axe of the executioner. Why, when a child I dreamt of it. In my childhood no joy had I, no games, no fairy tales of happiness and love—nought but the sad story of my mother, a story for me to brood and dream on. Afterwards when my sister was queen, the axe of the executioner, the crown of England hung both above my head. Recollection and home have so united them in my heart that I have never separated them.'

Nothing is left in life for this tragic, grey-haired queen, and we know the story which relates that her mind was so distracted with the story of the ring and its tragic

[1] Cf. *Shakespearian Tragedy*, A. C. Bradley, p. 23.

end that she never went to bed nor took any sustenance from that instant.

It is noticeable how Benavente has used in this play the old-fashioned soliloquy in order that Elizabeth may pour out the torrent of her thoughts. But are not those soliloquies the features of the modern expressionist dramas where the characters go through the play not listening to anything except the voice of their own soul? Their part is not to listen to the talk of any persons on the stage, but to speak to and interpret themselves.

When we look past the dazzling radiance of Elizabeth and discern the dimly silhouetted historic characters who support her, we find that the author has worked in many beautiful details. Sir Walter Raleigh, perpetually smoking, is the gallant soldier who can never disguise his thoughts. He is the contrary to the courtier of courtiers, Sir Fulke Greville, with his euphemistic conceits and flattery. Lady Scroop, the tender sister of the Earl, Lady Arabella, the spiteful Countess of Nottingham, all are described with Benaventian subtlety without ever letting them advance into the foreground.

It would be pleasant to take leave of Benavente's plays after so beautiful an example of his work as *La Vestal de Occidente*. The two plays, *Una Señora*[1] and *Una Pobre Mujer*[2] are, in comparison, a sad decline. Before writing them one might say that Benavente walked out into our modern world, not stopping until he reached the poor and wretched quarters of our big cities; there he saw many sights which filled his heart with pity. Then he returned to his study and wrote those two plays which, we might say, are poor examples of that social drama of which Mr. Galsworthy is so

[1] Stage romance produced 2nd January 1920.
[2] Drama produced 13th April 1920.

brilliant an exponent. Benavente is as thoroughly feminist as Roberto Bracco, but he has no remedies to offer. Society is wicked and heartless because it is based on man's egoism, and modern civilization with its overcramming, its poverty, stifles the innocent and the wicked, the fit and the unfit, with hideous impartiality. Like Granville Barker, Benavente has absorbed himself in an intensive study of the social surroundings of his plays, and subordinates a great deal of the story to the description of manners and character, but, unlike Granville Barker, he does not follow the practice of obtruding himself between the reader and the character with long stage directions. Benavente never has been in the habit of giving stage directions; instead, he lets his characters, by their dialogue, unfold themselves as well as their surroundings.

There is no trace of the serene, philosophic Benavente in *Una Señora* or *Una Pobre Mujer*—even his doctrine of sacrifice and renunciation serves those heroines to no purpose, and the latter play ends with Fermina's despairing cry—'why did they ever bring me into this world'—and we must thus close our study of Benavente's works on a note of the deepest pessimism. In these two plays the author has put away his philosophy, and has turned his eyes on the miseries of the modern world. After preaching charity and the brotherhood of man, he is unable to avert his gaze from realities. His mind is essentially a pessimistic one; even in his earliest satiric plays there is always present the discordant note of bitter disillusion. In the tragedies, the romantic comedies, the plays of middle-class life, there are few plays that end with the serenity that we notice in many of the plays of Galdós. He seems unable to look on the future with the easy optimism of Máximo Yuxte or Mariucha. Even in his greatest work, *Los Intereses Creados*, the fundamental basis is sad irony which cannot weep and so smiles. And

in the sequel to that play we see the triumph, not of an ennobled Crispín, but of all the worst elements in the state.

In the last period, since 1914, Benavente has tried to be a Galdós and to rise above the dust of contemporary life, but he has lost his hold on the realities of life and gives the impression of writing from memories that are fading. His heroes and heroines in most cases tend to become mere mechanical symbols of an abstract thought. In many cases also he falls into sentimentality, and mistakes rhetoric for art. He has always been apt to treat his characters like puppets, but in these latter plays he rarely lives with them at all. In the last two plays he has tried to describe the realities of life, but he has not been able to avoid weariness, and it even seems as if he was forever forcing his inspiration to invent occasions for pity. From a dramatic point of view there is no doubt that the most successful play of the period is *La Vestal de Occidente*, and Benavente in a striking way has managed to bring the superhuman figure of Queen Elizabeth on to the stage without shocking our historical sense. It is as if he had assimilated the works of Shakespeare so completely that he was able to write originally about the period of ' Merrie England '. The character of Elizabeth does not depart far from the historical, and yet in the psychological self-questionings we see the Benaventian heroine. From Shakespeare Benavente took much of his sadness—that sadness which makes him end the last play with a lament over life. He has now well passed his fiftieth year when man attains to wisdom, but also to sadness. According to Tennyson the spiritual history of great men can be summed up in the words ' From sin through sorrow unto thee we pass '. Benavente in the majority of these plays tries to show a moral purpose. Their construction from a dramatic point of view is sometimes very faulty,

and often it appears as if he had intended to make them philosophical dialogues. Experience of the vast world has made him the ironist, kinder towards men.[1] Indeed it may be said that sentimental kindness has killed his inspiration. We recall to mind Anatole France's maxim: 'Without irony the world would be like a forest without birds'; and Benavente in his later works seems to have lost his power of singing.

[1] Since the year 1920 Benavente has written but few plays. His extended tour in North and South America, after the award of the Nobel Prize, brought him into contact with a great public, but it does not seem to have inspired his creative powers. On the 2nd of April this year (1924), a comedia in three acts, *Lecciones de Buen Amor*, was produced at Madrid. It is a slender domestic comedy, showing the duties of parents towards their children.

CONCLUSION

It has often been said that dramatic art, fully developed in the form of the acted play, is not only the self-realization of the individual but of society itself. For this reason we might even call Benavente in his works an expression of modern Spain. In the countless visions of his stage we see the pictured struggle of countless aspirations in the modern Spanish mind. His plays are before anything else a series of attempts to reconcile the outer and social life of the modern Spaniard with his interior life, the life of his own soul. In no modern dramatist do we get a sharper line of demarcation between what we might call conscious and subconscious action than in Benavente's works. Being an actor himself and acquainted with all the tricks of the stage, he has mastered the science of the dramatic architect in a way that would draw praise even from a William Archer or a Brander Matthews. Dumas Fils once said that the first qualification of an accomplished dramatist was logic which should be implacable from beginning to end, and Benavente fulfils this definition. The outer frame of his plays is always worked out with remorseless logic. The movement of the characters on the stage, their exits and their entrances, the relation between scene and scene, act and act, the physical structure of the action of each scene, its muscular system, as Mr. Granville Barker calls it, are always scrupulously developed. In many cases the outer plot rests on the most commonplace foundations, but however commonplace, it is always worked out according to absolute reality. In making this outer plot commonplace and of scanty importance Benavente meant it to be only a frame to

enclose the far more interesting inner or subconscious action. There seems always to be an outer stage which is to be a threshold to the inner play. On that outer stage everything is fixed and immutable like the old mask plays of the *commedia dell' arte*. We must pass beyond to the inner stage where all life is in a continuous fluid movement, where emotion may be expressed in a number of ways. Benavente tries ceaselessly to suggest this subconscious life, where thought is in the process of formation. As Mr. Underhill says, the tendency of his art is away from the plastic towards the insubstantial, the transparent.[1] The drama of the subconscious mind Benavente may be said to have introduced into Spain, just as Roberto Bracco introduced it into Italy, and the theories exposed by the latter in the Preface to his play *Il Piccolo Santo* (1909)[2] might be applied to the later Benaventian drama.

'I have been told', he says, 'dramatic art does not admit that it is possible to make the public understand what is not definitely expressed by the words and action of the characters in the play. The novelist, it is said, can intervene between his characters and the reader, explaining this and commenting on that, touching up and analysing, but the playwright has only very limited means at his disposal. If his characters themselves do not explain their own thoughts, their feelings, there is no way of knowing them or understanding what they are doing. Nevertheless I maintain my belief—perhaps imprudently—that a comprehensive synthesis of significant signs can confer the necessary clearness for rendering on the stage even what is not really expressed. Just as the sun's rays are reflected and united in the focus of a concave mirror, so the clear lines of truth are united in the brain centre of the spectator, whose emotions are roused, together with that additional meaning which his intense sensibility can discern beyond the outer semblance of the character and their surroundings. And that which his sensibility creates is precisely

[1] Cf. J. G. Underhill, *Benavente*, vol. ii, p. ix.
[2] Not produced until 1912.

a synthesis of significant signs, concealing a substantial reality behind the superficial reality.'[1]

These complicated words of Bracco show how complicated the whole idea is. The essential elements of those dramas of the subconscious mind hardly ever find a direct and consonant expression because they remain fixed in the depths of the existence of beings whose words and acts do not correspond to their souls. Thus in *Il Piccolo Santo* each of the chief characters ignores the reality that lies hidden behind their mask of conventional, everyday life. In Benavente's play, *La Inmaculada de Los Dolores*, Asunción, who has become accustomed to wear the mask of renunciation, finds out suddenly that her inner self has long since ceased to wear the mask. In *La Vestal de Occidente* Elizabeth's tragedy is revealed to us bit by bit as she pours out her soul to us in those impassioned monologues. Benavente with this drama of reflection is in the forefront of the moderns. He has led Spanish drama along the road marked out by authors like François de Curel, towards the new citadel whose guardian is Luigi Pirandello. As an eminent Italian critic says of this modern drama, the true protagonist is Thought, King Thought, who was represented by Edgar Allan Poe, seated in crowned state on a throne of suffering in an enchanted palace.[2]

Few things are more interesting than to watch the gradual formation of an artist's personality through his work. In the case of our author the case is especially interesting, for his whole work contradicts the old axiom that artists spring to life in full panoply like Athene from the brain of Zeus. Spain is notoriously the country of the born artist who has never had to

[1] Bracco, Preface to *Il Piccolo Santo*, pp. 10–11. The preface is of great interest to students of modern European drama.

[2] A. Tilgher, *Studi Sul Teatro Contemp*, p. 49.

go to school: in the long line of literature how many[1] writers resembled Zorrilla, who in his *Recollections* relates that he wrote plays in twenty-four hours! Benavente only reached his high position at the cost of immense toil. As a critic has said, the sources of each play can be easily found in the majority of cases in some poem or article written by him in his earliest period of work.[2] There is nothing in the nature of improvisation about Benavente's drama: the creatures of his fancy have not sprung on to the stage in a sudden burst of inspiration, but have evolved first through a long process, whether they be the sad-eyed heroines of the tragedies or the flimsy, tinselled characters of the *zarzuela*. His most conspicuous quality is intellectual and proceeds from germination rather than crystallization. Clearness of mind that is for ever criticizing itself appears in all his works, and we soon accustom ourselves to imagine the master as an impish god standing beside the scales. We must, however, differ from the critics who state that Benavente's vocation as dramatist was purely accidental, and that the path of the theatre was one of the many active paths he might have chosen. He has himself said that even as a child he took a delight in fashioning theatrical pieces. Then his experiences with the clowns of the circus show that his mind was for ever turned towards the scenic spectacle. In his earliest works we notice attempts at the type of play that afterwards he developed. His short stories in *Vilanos* and *Figulinas* naturally fell into dialogue, because by that dramatic form alone was he able to convey his impressions. These short dialogues in *Figulinas* were to Benavente like Giotto's circle. When we take the early works like *Gente Conocida* or *El Automóvil* we find that they were

[1] Cf. J. Zorrilla, *Recuerdos del Tiempo Viejo*, Madrid, 1880.

[2] Alejandro Miquis, *Las Mejores Páginas de Benavente*, vol. ii, Epilogo.

but expansions of some satiric short dialogues ; intrigue is reduced to the lowest degree and the play resolves itself into a collection of dialogue scenes. Benavente has seldom abandoned this system of play construction, formerly so dear to Becque with his ' tranches de Vie '.

In the first period of plays we find Benavente lashing out at the society of his day with the steel whip of the satirist, but his satire was never severe enough to leave deep weals, only pin-pricks. Often he is not trying to satirize but rather to give an exact representation of society. The description which Azorín gives of Galdós, gazing intently with his sharp little eyes on all the hubbub of Spanish life, might with reason be applied also to Benavente, though with certain reservations. Whereas Galdós was a national force driving men before him with a club of Hercules, Benavente was not a force at all. He contented himself with following men like his character Tomillares, ' ciceroni ' of Madrid as he calls them, to the haunts of society, and noting down ironically their observations. Galdós is more generous than Benavente the satirist, who seems to have divested himself of every illusion, and who tests all things by his thin laughter.

Many critics have attached great importance to his introduction into Spain of foreign methods of drama, and more than once the accusation has been levelled against him that he introduced the ' théâtre boulevardier ' from Paris (e. g. *Criterion*, April 1923). There is no doubt that in the form and structure of his early plays Benavente followed the models of Becque, Donnay, and Lavedan. There are many *clichés* characteristic of the French school, and there is a hard, metallic brilliance which ever suggests the Parisian *persiflage*, but we should not push the idea too far. The satiric spirit in Benavente was not derived from his assimilation of French methods but was true to his Spanish race. The Spanish writers from early

antiquity have possessed the gift of satire. Even in the fourteenth century we find Juan Ruiz el Arcipreste de Hita smiling indulgently at the world's follies when writing his *Libro de Buen Amor*. He, too, attacked vigorously the society of his time and called aloud for relief from the abuses of the clergy. So, too, did Pero López de Ayala, another great social satirist of the same period, and in the Epicurean, Rabelaisian laughter of the high priest, and the sad disillusionment and austerity of the chancellor, we can see the typical qualities of Spanish satire. This satiric spirit has lived on vigorously in this most traditional people: we find it in the rude Coplas of *Mingo Revulgo*, and especially in the countless novels of roguery whose fame spread from Spain to other European countries. We find it in *La Celestina*, which was to be the chief pillar of the Spanish drama: we find it in the realistic 'pasos' of Lope de Rueda, the seasoned Entremeses of Cervantes. A chastened spirit it appears again in the kind Quiñones de Benavente of the seventeenth, and in Ramón de la Cruz of the eighteenth century. Thus Benavente is true to his Castilian race and the spirit of satire in him is according to tradition. In the plays from *Gente Conocida* to *La Gobernadora* he is mainly occupied in showing the outer face of society—the mask, and there is but little representation of the face beneath the mask. But the coming of the new century caused a further stage in the evolution of the young writer's style. The growth of Idealism softened the sarcastic curl of his lip into the 'slim feasting smile'. At first the smile was not to appear, for Benavente turned to the tragic cothurnus. The plays *Sacrificios* (1901) and *Alma Triunfante* (1902), with their doctrine of renunciation, are full of the echoing, suggestive spirit of Maeterlinck. Benavente had assimilated full well the message of *Trésor des Humbles* which had appeared in 1896. In these plays there is mysticism—

not the morbid exaltation against which Croce fulminates in his article on the tendencies of the most recent literature,[1] but mysticism as a force, a reality; for has not the Belgian master said that between the supreme mysticism and the supreme energy there exists a perfect equation? In these plays Benavente's style becomes subtle and veiled like that of the symbolists as if he had followed Mallarmés's admonition: 'il doit y avoir toujours énigme en poésie: nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la puissance du poème, qui est fait du bonheur de deviner peu à peu; le suggérer, voilà le rêve.' The characters are not expressed in pure objective manner as in the former dramas, but little by little their personality unfolds itself by means of the author's magical power of suggestion. Benavente had already learnt how to give to them the ever varying rhythm of life. It is as though the spirit of the author had broken itself into atoms that dart hither and thither like quicksilver, in quest of this or that truth. His drama is bewildering in its complexity: in the years from 1901 to 1914 every type of drama except verse drama was attempted. A one-act frivolous *sainete* like *Modas*, a little sketch like *La Sonrisa de la Gioconda*, is as characteristic of this Fregoli as the great spectacles *La Noche del Sábado* or *El Dragón de Fuego*. The reason for the ever-changing variety of Benavente's plays lay in that necessity imposed on the comic poet, to amuse his public. The playwright to preserve his reputation is bound to serve up to his well-stacked public the subjects most likely to win their applause—a principle which Dr. Johnson frankly accepted when he said:

> The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give,
> For we that live to please, must please to live.

This will explain the enormous amount of plays pro-

[1] Cf. *Letteratura della nuova Italia*, vol. iv.

duced between 1901 and 1914. In a manner characteristic of the prolific Spanish dramatists of the seventeenth century, Benavente wooed his fickle public incessantly: in the last thirty years he has written nearly ninety plays.[1]

In the introductory chapter of this book we have shown the unmistakable awakening that took place in Spanish literary life in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Two spirits moulded the destinies of the young writers—Humour and Feminism. In the long list of dramas produced in the period from 1870 to 1898, it is a remarkable fact that the spirit of humour is almost entirely absent. In the plays of Echegeray, Cano or Dicenta, rarely do we meet with that genuine humour of the mind. If the Spanish dramatists of that period ever smiled, it was the harsh curl of the lip that denoted the cave man with his bludgeon. As George Meredith says: 'When the sexes are separated, men and women grow as the Portuguese call it, *afaimados*, of one another, famine stricken: and all the tragic elements are on the stage. Don Juan is a comic character that sends souls flying: nor does the humour of breaking of a dozen women's hearts conciliate the comic muse with the drawing of blood.'[2] The great service rendered by the dramatists of the 1898 generation, under the leadership of Benavente, was the gradual restoration of the spirit of Humour. Benavente reintroduced the comic spirit which was to correct pretentiousness, inflation, dullness, and the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among men. 'The spirit of comedy is the ultimate civilizer, the polisher, a sweet cook—her laughter of reason refreshed is floriferous like the magical great gale of the

[1] Eighty-six plays of Benavente have been acted. To these we must add four monologues, seven translations of English, French, and Catalan plays and various dramatic sketches.

[2] G. Meredith, *Essay on Comedy*.

shifty spring deciding for summer.'[1] Benavente had soaked his mind in Shakespearian humour so as to introduce this new spirit. In his earliest work, *El Teatro Fantástico*, he not only wrote little sketches that seem to be miniature evocations of the gentle bard's spirit seen through the lens of Alfred de Musset, writer of *Proverbes en action*, but he paraphrased scenes out of some of the great comedies. These little works were studies of preparation. In his first period of plays we have seen him flogging the abuses of his time, though rather than flogging we should say that he pierced those follies with a fine Toledo rapier. Aristophanes and Shakespeare might soar on the wings of their riotous imagination with their garlands and singing robes about them, but Benavente's aim then, like Molière's, was a sober one : not to attack individuals, nor to romanticize life, but to depict men and women of Madrid in their social relations.

If we examine the general output of literature in the early years of the new century we find that authors on the one hand were dominated by idealism and mysticism, and on the other by a desire to look at the world in all its reality. The antagonism between the spirit of idealism and the spirit of realism produced Humour, that spirit which so many philosophers from Aristotle down to Bergson have tried to shackle by definitions. As Barrow says : ' Humour is that which all see and know, and one better apprehends what it is by acquaintance than I can inform him by description. It is indeed so versatile and uniform, appearing in so many shapes, so many postures, so many garbs, so variously apprehended by several eyes and judgements that it seemeth no less hard to settle a clear and certain notion thereof than to make a picture of Proteus or define the figure of floating air.' The spirit of Benavente that starts off by wielding the lash of satire,

[1] G. Meredith, Chapter I of *The Egoist*.

little by little softens into a gentle gravity where the sadness tempers to a smile, irony that cannot weep and so smiles. To explain the rise in contemporary Spain of that gentle humour which had been absent from the previous drama, we should give full credit to the blossoming in Spain of the Feminist movement. In the dramas of Echegeray, woman was treated in the same cavalier manner as in the golden age of Tirso de Molina and Calderón. In these red romantic plays brothers lock up sisters in convents, fathers assert their authority over their hapless daughters: woman, in a word, is entirely under the domination of the jealous male. But with the Renaissance of 1898 we find all that changed in the drama, which henceforth becomes avowedly feminist. The plays of Benavente and Galdós pointed the way that has been followed by such authors as Linares Rivas, Martínez Sierra, and the brothers Quintero. In considering the use of the comic spirit in contemporary drama we must follow again George Meredith when he says that 'comedy belongs to cultivated men and women, who do not skim the cream of life and are attached, yet escape the harsher blows'. 'Cultivated women', he says, 'should recognize that the comic muse is one of their best friends.'[1] In Benavente's theatre cultivated woman is the cynosure of all eyes. The subtle delicacy of his style evoked faint sylphlike heroines that seem to be faint echoes of Desdemona, Ophelia, and Helena reaching our ears down the centuries. Desdemona and Helena are of this world, magnified by imagination: so, too, is Doll the sweet and gentle, who sacrifices her own life when she sees that her husband loves her sister: so, too, Isabel, who feigns madness in order to return to the asylum forever, when she finds out that her husband has united himself with Emilia. Shakespeare poured all the fragrance of his magic phial into

[1] G. Meredith, *Essay on Comedy*.

his heroines : the creation of their beauty was a labour of love that lifted him above the slings and arrows of the world. Ibsen, too, in the creation of his heroines, found relief from his gloomy pessimistic soul struggles. Shakespeare was the first English poet to raise up the status of woman, the first to give her a soul : so, too, Benavente, after roaming through the woods and wilds with Rosalind and Miranda, evoked the modern woman of his country and made her the presiding spirit of his drama.

The plays of Shakespeare not only left traces of their influence on Benavente's heroines but also on his heroes and on the structure of his plays. Perhaps no play has made so deep an impression as *Hamlet*, and Spanish modern drama has felt all the sway of what Mr. Walkley calls ' Hamletism '. The great majority of the heroes of modern psychological drama are ' melancholy ' like Hamlet. We should remember that in 1601, when *Hamlet* was written, the ' melancholy type ' was almost a fashionable figure in England and the word ' melancholy ' was a favourite expression. Any one who wished to cut a really distinguished figure pulled his black hat with the long black plume far over his face, wore a long black cloak, and posed. ' Why so melancholy ? ' was the fashionable question if people wished to be polite. Not only Hamlet, but many other characters in Shakespeare, such as Jaques and Richard II, were melancholy. In the early years of the present century, as the result of the new theories of Idealism and Mysticism, young men in Spain wore a self-conscious and melancholy aspect. As Professor Altamira says in his essay on the tendencies of modern Spanish literature, there was a recrudescence of a new type of Bohemianism which might be called ' Murgerism '. In nearly all the Benaventian plays the heroes are ' sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought ', and suffer from Hamletism. Forever analysing their

motives, they dispel all their generous energies, and, like Leonardo in *La Noche del Sábado*, they allow their ideal to be shattered into little atoms. In many cases external action is reduced to a minimum and the drama consists in the inner conflict in the mind of the hero between two lines of conduct. In *La Propia Estimación* Aurelio unveils his heart and soul, and weighs them in the scales before us : in *El Mal que Nos Hacen* Germán by his self-analysis loses all power of action and is abandoned, even by the girl who loved him. Instead of living dramatically a vigorous life of their own, these heroes rather explain to us the personality of Benavente himself, who creates his characters and gives them his own conflicting motives. Then when he has got them on to the stage he lets them act their part while he pulls the wires for them, grinning and scoffing all the time. As a comparison let us turn to Shakespeare's *Richard II*, in whose mind we see the alternation of the most conflicting views : the consciousness of his sacred power as lawful sovereign : his sense of his inviolable right : the remorse for sin, his pride humbled, his resignation to the decrees of fate or divine will, the bitterness and sarcasm against himself and others :

> Within the hollow crown
> That rounds the mortal temples of a King,
> Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits
> Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
> Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
> To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks,
> Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
> As if this flesh which walls about our life
> Were brass impregnable, and humour'd thus
> Comes at last and with a little pin
> Bores through his Castle, and farewell King.

So struggle the titanic Kings of Shakespeare with their inner selves without, however, losing their high majesty. Benavente, though he studied deeply those titans,

could not create on such a pattern: his characters tend to lose their stature and their life owing to their complexities. Like the personages of Pirandello they are such machines of intellectuality that they cease to be men of flesh and bones and become puppets. Shakespeare looked on life as a theatre where each character frets and struts his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more, but he never pulled wires for marionettes. Benavente's fault is that he looked on the children of his fancy with too intellectual an eye and made them mechanical. Instead of having the vigorous personality of the Shakespearian hero, they are weak and always choose the path of renunciation with relief to their tortured minds.

It is interesting to compare the plays written about Court life with Shakespeare's historical plays. Shakespeare, though he makes his Kings suffer all the tortured pangs of mind in an increased degree owing to their exalted station, yet living as he did in the age of the 'Divine Right of Kings', allowed all his ideas to be coloured by that principle. Benavente, on the other hand, lives in an age when we have reached the opposite pole. Kings must submit to be the equals of other mortals if they are to retain their shadowy rank. In each of these Court plays, *La Noche del Sábado*, *Princesa Bebé*, and *La Escuela de las Princesas*, the royal personages so far from attempting to preserve their royal demeanour, their Olympian frown, try to enter the lives of ordinary men and enjoy their pleasures. Prince Florencio, though he is heir to the throne, prefers to spend his time in one of the watering-places along the Riviera in company with mountebanks, adventurers, and swindlers. Prince Alejandro who, after the assassination of Prince Florencio, is the heir to the throne of Suavia, takes no thought of his responsibilities until he falls under the dominating sway of the courtezan Imperia. In *Princesa Bebé* the

young married pair, Prince Esteban and Princess Elena, agree to separate because both wish to taste the life of pleasure of the ordinary citizen. In *La Escuela de las Princesas* the young Princess Costanza has to renounce her love in order that her duty to the state may be fulfilled. Benavente sums up his theory of Princes and Kings in the following words: 'My philosophy is very simple, to accept my social position with all its duties, to understand that only in fulfilling them freely, that is to say of our own free will, could we be happy . . . and that only in this way can we be equals of other men who have not been born princes.'

The drama of Benavente, as a Spanish writer has said, is reasoning in its essence but fantastic in its form. In subtle details of dialogue he resembled Molière, and those numerous little details give an impression of reality to a play that seems by its nature to be fantastic, where the scene is laid in imaginary regions. Benavente, whose spirit is always trying to fly away to fairy lands forlorn, by those realistic touches prevents us from losing our hold on reality. In plays like *La Copa Encantada* (based on a story of Ariosto) and *La Princesa Sin Corazón* he gives full rein to his fantasy: in the Court plays, *El Dragón de fuego* and the two plays based on the *commedia dell' arte*, there is the perpetual antithesis between filmy fantasy and hard reality. Those plays show us the true humour of Benavente which he derived among other things from his deep study of the Shakespearian comedies—that humour which we might call, as Richter does, romantic comic.

And in these plays we may see an evocation of Shakespeare's comedy of romance through Benavente's modern personality. The romantic comedy of Shakespeare includes the comedies from *Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Twelfth Night*. Nearly all of them are set in beautiful surroundings—a wood near Athens for *Midsummer Night's Dream*, sea-coast gardens for

Twelfth Night, gardens again for *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the Forest of Arden for *As You Like It*. In every case he tries, not to evoke the merrie glades of England or the hum of the city, but a land remote in distance, in time. These comedies expressed more than any plays the soft, gentle humour of Shakespeare. In *La Noche del Sábado* the fantastically beautiful surroundings are subtly suggested by the beautiful prologue, which frames the drama in a way that recalls Debussy's music to *Pelléas et Mélisande*. In *La Escuela de las Princesas* the scene is laid in an imaginary kingdom, Alfania, and in *El Dragón de Fuego* the author chooses India, land of dreams. In perhaps his most perfect work, *Los Intereses Creados*, he suggests the beauty of the moonlit night which illuminates the love of Silvia and Leandro in a way that recalls Shakespeare.

From the seventeenth century Benavente learnt the habit of inserting in his plays passages of exquisitely chiselled prose that have a lyrical beauty. The prologue to *La Noche del Sábado*, the epilogue to *El Dragón de Fuego*, the prologue and the final scene in *Los Intereses Creados*, Elizabeth's monologues in *La Vestal de Occidente*, are all examples of his power. At other times he disfigures his plays by a tendency towards elaborating artificial conceits. In the later plays there are many patches of bombastic lyricism inserted without any regard for the action. The action remains stationary while the hero or heroine draw on their imagination for some poetical image of their thoughts. It was not only from Shakespeare and the minor Elizabethans that Benavente drew this tendency towards artificial conceits of style. Spanish literature, even more than English, French, or Italian, suffered from the effects of preciosity or, as it was called, ' culteranismo '. The example of Gongora, whose style, according to Lope de Vega, resembles ' the winged figures in pictures

with swollen cheeks blowing trumpets, or the winds as they are represented in maps', has left a heritage to all succeeding writers in Spain. Artificial conceits rivalling those of *Las Soledades* abound in the romantics of the nineteenth century, and Echegaray was no exception to the rule. Benavente, in spite of his modernism, was never able to escape from lapses into artificial style any more than Pinero in his early plays. In the plays of the seventeenth century a lyrical, artificial style was absolutely necessary in order to conceal the lack of scenic illusion. Atmosphere and surroundings were evoked for the spectator by rhetoric. If the scene changed from one country to another, from the hum of the city to the enchanted forest, the lyrical power of the poet had ever to suggest. Signs, however, are not wanting to show that even in the seventeenth century the public were beginning to go to the theatre in order to admire the scenery rather than the words of the play, and Lope says that 'the managers avail themselves of the machinery, the poets of the carpenters, and the auditors of their eyes. But to return to the common people, I say that they are justly moved by this machinery to delight the eyes, but not by the Spanish Comedia, where the figures rise and descend so clumsily, and animals and birds appear in like manner, which the ignorance of the women and the rude mechanics among men come to see.'[1] On the modern stage, with all its improvements in scenic production, its rule of the fourth wall, its box-scene, rhetorical and lyrical flourishes sound incongruous, except in the true poetic drama which is a 'genre' apart. Benavente's artificial conceits at times hold up the action and weary the modern spectator. However beautiful some of these passages may appear in fantastic

[1] H. Rennert, *Life of Lope de Vega*, Glasgow, 1904, pp. 289 foll. Also H. Rennert, *The Spanish Stage*, Hispanic Society of America, 1909, p. 97.

plays like *La Noche del Sábado* and *El Dragón de Fuego*, they are out of place in psychological plays dealing with modern middle-class life. It is in *Los Intereses Creados* that we may observe the perfect fusion of Benavente's poetic and psychological qualities, that wonderful suppleness which he seemed to have inherited traditionally from Lope de Vega and from his close study of Shakespeare. In reading that play we seem to see a shadowy pageant of the glorious golden Spain of the past, appearing out of Benavente's personality as through a maze. Crispín sums up the ruses of the 'gracioso' who used to be Atlas bearing on his shoulders the burden of the play with its intrigues. Crispín, subtle weaver of stratagems, evokes for us the picaresque anti-hero whose 'belly thunderous' and sharp wits have not taken away his power of criticizing life. But Crispín, clad in his robes of the past, in the twinkling of an eye can change his colour chameleon-like and appear to us as the modern superman, who is determined to live dangerously or be extinguished. Behind the gay imbroglio, the salted aphorisms on life, the rapid movement, the tender lyricism, we arrive at the author's artistic criticism of life. Benavente, the subtle humorist whose humour is the emanation of his indulgent pity for humanity, beckons to us to listen to his message. To him, conventions of society, hide-bound morality, love as it is looked on by the world, are all but bonds of interest, threads which can be pulled by the superman-showman Crispín, who is a Master of life. Let us not ask from this exquisite ironist whose figures have the dainty delicacy of fine porcelain, for the rude shocks of tragedy, for the kingly stature demanded by Aristotle. In his tragedies the characters make haste to throw off the cothurnus: nor can they stare rough passion in the face, but gaze at it diminished through the mist of their fantasy. Benavente in his supreme mood resembles some subtle

modern musician like Debussy or Ravel, who evokes old popular melodies of his country—rugged, passionate tunes sprung from the soil, but in such a way that they float wistfully to our ears down the course of centuries. Through the ever-variable stream of modern harmony symbolizing the ceaseless ebb and flow of life, fragments of these tunes reach us, and by intuition we complete the melody, we fill in the picture. So, too, Benavente, amid his flexible dramatic harmonies, suggests faintly the outline of all those old beliefs attached to the soil of Spain. For once we see them, not in towering stature and occupying the whole stage, but dwarfed to their proportionate size in the mosaic of the modern world.

There is a touch of the sublime coldness of Shakespeare in Benavente which enables him at times to rise to the mountain peak and gaze down on humanity. His spirit has many of the qualities associated with the classic. In his best works he does not tear passion to tatters nor play on the string of a single emotion : he treats emotion as something which is aroused for an ulterior purpose, in order that all who hear it may reach a perfect human mood, wherein the various emotions of man shall properly blend. Emotion in Benavente, as in the classic artist, is always in harness. As in the classic artist, there is also in him a subtle spirit of proportion : he sees the world and human beings, not magnified through the strong lens of the romantic, but according to his own normal vision. As a critic has said—the object of the classical spirit on the stage is the creating in the mind, in proper order, the sum of all human emotions, and Benavente is forever standing at the scales. In form his drama is classical in its restraint and classical in its fixed types, but is not that classicism only the outer face, the mask? Underneath do we not see everywhere in his works a restless spirit of adventure, characteristic of the modern romantic who is desirous of new things. The term Romantic is

a dubious one to use, for it suggests the red waistcoats of 1830, the frown of a Byron, the volubility of a Hugo, whilst Benavente sums up his ideal in the dictum that one should tranquillize emotion through the intelligence. 'Intelligence', he says, 'is the conscience of truth.' Let us not think of all his creations as a chill offspring of his intelligence: 'at times there descends into the hearts of all, there descends from heaven an invisible thread, as if woven out of sunlight and moonbeams, the invisible thread of love, which makes these men and women almost divine, and brings to our brows the smile and splendour of the dawn, lends wings to our drooping spirits, and whispers to us that all is not play in the play, that there is something noble, something divine in our lives which is true and eternal and will not end when the play of life shall close.'

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LIST OF BENAVENTE'S PLAYS

1892. *Teatro Fantástico.* Short pieces.
1894. *El Nido Ajeno.* Comedia in three acts.
1896. *Gente Conocida.* Scenes of modern life in four acts.
1897. *El Marido de la Téllez.* Dramatic sketch in one act.
De Alivio. Monologue.
Don Juan (translation of Molière). Comedia in five acts.
La Farándula. Comedia in two acts.
1898. *La Comida de las Fieras.* Comedia in three acts.
Teatro Feminista. Zarzuela in one act. Music by Barbero.
1899. *Cuento de Amor* (from Shakespeare). Comedia in three acts.
Operación Quirúrgica. Comedia in one act.
Despedida Cruel. Comedia in one act.
1900. *La Gata de Angora.* Comedia in four acts.
Viaje de Instrucción. Zarzuela in one act. Music by Vives.
Por la Herida. Drama in one act.
1901. *Modas.* Sainete in one act.
Lo Cursi. Comedia in three acts.
Sin Querer. Dramatic sketch in one act.
Sacrificios. Drama in three acts.
La Gobernadora. Comedia in three acts.
El Primo Román. Comedia in three acts.
1902. *Amor de Amar.* Comedia in two acts.
Libertad (translation of Santo Rusiñol). Comedia in three acts.
El Tren de los Maridos. Comedia in two acts.
Alma Triunfante. Drama in three acts.
El Automóvil. Comedia in two acts.
1903. *La Noche del Sábado.* Stage romance in five tableaux.
Los Favoritos (adapted from Shakespeare). Comedia in one act.
El Hombrecito. Comedia in three acts.
Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle (translated from A. Dumas). Comedia in five acts.
Por Qué Se Ama. Comedia in one act.
Al Natural. Comedia in two acts.
La Casa de la Dicha. Comedia in one act.
El Dragón de Fuego. Drama in three acts.
1904. *Richelieu* (translated from Bulwer Lytton). Drama in five acts.

1904. *La Princesa Bebé.* Comedia in four acts.
No Fumadores. Sketch in one act.
1905. *Rosas de Otoño.* Comedia in three acts.
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Cuento inmoral. Monologue.
La Sobresalienta. Zarzuela in one act. Music by Chapí.
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1906. *Más Fuerte que el Amor.* Drama in four acts.
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1907. *Los Buhos.* Comedia in three acts.
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La Princesa sin Corazón. Fairy play.
El Amor asusta. Comedia in one act.
La Copa Encantada (adapted from Ariosto). Zarzuela in one act. Music by Lleó.
Los Ojos de los Muertos. Drama in three acts.
La Historia de Otelo. Dramatic sketch in one act.
La Sonrisa de La Gioconda. Dramatic sketch in one act.
El Último Minué. Dramatic sketch in one act.
Todos somos Unos. Zarzuela in one act. Music by Lleó.
Los Intereses Creados. Puppet play in two acts.
1908. *Señora Ama.* Comedia in three acts.
El Marido de su Viuda. Comedia in one act.
La Fuerza Bruta. Comedia in one act.
De Pequeñas Causas. Dramatic sketch in one act.
Hacia la Verdad. Dramatic sketch in one act.
1909. *Por las Nubes.* Comedia in two acts.
De Cerca. Comedia in one act.
¡A Ver qué hace un Hombre! Dramatic sketch in one act.
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1910. *El Nietecito.* Entremés.
1911. *La Losa de los Sueños.* Comedia in two acts.
1913. *La Malquerida.* Drama in three acts.
1914. *El Destino Manda* (from Paul Hervieu). Drama in two acts.
1915. *El Collar de Estrellas.* Comedia in four acts.
La Verdad. Dialogue.

1915. *La Propia Estimación.* Comedia in three acts.
1916. *Campo de Armiño.* Comedia in three acts.
La Túnica Amarilla. Comedia in three tableaux and a prologue.
La Ciudad Alegre y Confiada.
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1918. *Los Cachorros.* Comedia in three acts.
Mefistófela. Comic operetta in three acts.
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1919. *Por ser con Todos Leal ser para Todos Traidor.* Drama in three acts.
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La Honra de los Hombres. Drama in two acts.
El Audaz. Adaptation in five acts.
La Cenicienta. Magic play in three acts and a prologue.
Una Señora. Stage romance in three acts.
Una Pobre Mujer. Drama in three acts.
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1924. *Lecciones de Buen Amor.* Comedia in three acts.

The collected works of Jacinto Benavente are published by Librería de los Sucesores de Hernando, Madrid.

Note.—We have used the term *comedia* and *drama* in their Spanish sense. *Comedia* means a play with a happy ending. It may be serious in subject. *Drama* means a play with a sad ending.

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Starkie, Walter, 1894-
Jacinto Benavente

GENERAL LOAN COLLECTION
Oregon State Library
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